the weekly Standard

NOVEMBER 9, 1998 $3.50

THE RIDDLE OF RONALD REAGAN
NORMAN PODHORETZ

THE COMING PALESTINIAN STATE

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

John Conyers's Circus
TUCKER CARLSON

Free Trade Nationalism
BRINK LINDSEY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the weekly Standard

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 9 • NOVEMBER 9, 1998

2 SCRAPBOOK

4 CORRESPONDENCE

6 CASUAL
Christopher Caldwell parties at Studio 54.

7 EDITORIAL
A Crooked President

9 JOHN CONYERS'S CIRCUS
Not the Greatest Show on Earth. *by* **Tucker Carlson**

10 FREE-TRADE NATIONALISM
Do it unilaterally, defend it boldly. *by* **Brink Lindsey**

13 STARR-HAZING
What Judiciary Democrats have in mind. *by* **Matthew Rees**

14 BLIND TO GIBBON'S CHARMS
Who wants to get his eyes checked now? *by* **Woody West**

40 PARODY
David Halberstam, the best and the brightest.

Kent Lemon

17 THE COMING PALESTINIAN STATE
Wye is the bridge to next year's Middle East showdown. *by* **Charles Krauthammer**

22 THE RIDDLE OF REAGAN
No wonder Edmund Morris is having such a hard time. *by* **Norman Podhoretz**

Books & Arts

31 POLLUTING RACE RELATIONS Christopher H. Foreman Jr. and environmental justice. *by* **Roger Clegg**

34 THE NEVER-ENDING STRUGGLE Balint Vazsonyi's report from the battlefield. *by* **Michael Nyilis**

35 BOOKING THE FUTURE The promise of e-books and digital printing. *by* **Pia Nordlinger**

38 UNPLEASANTVILLE A new movie takes a 1960s look at the 1950s. *by* **Daniel Wattenberg**

William Kristol, *Editor and Publisher* **Fred Barnes,** *Executive Editor*
David Tell, *Opinion Editor* **David Brooks, Andrew Ferguson,** *Senior Editors* **Richard Starr, Claudia Winkler,** *Managing Editors*
J. Bottum, *Books & Arts Editor* **Christopher Caldwell,** *Senior Writer* **Jay Nordlinger,** *Associate Editor*
Tucker Carlson, Matt Labash, Matthew Rees, *Staff Writers* **Kent Bain,** *Art Director*
Victorino Matus, *Assistant Editor* **Katherine Rybak,** *Assistant Art Director* **Jonathan V. Last, Pia Nordlinger,** *Reporters*
John J. DiIulio Jr., Joseph Epstein, David Frum, David Gelernter, Brit Hume,
Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, P. J. O'Rourke, John Podhoretz, *Contributing Editors*
David H. Bass, *Deputy Publisher* **Jennifer L. Felten,** *Business Manager*
Nicholas H.B. Swezey, *Advertising & Marketing Manager* **John L. Mackall,** *Advertising Sales Manager* **Lauren C. Trotta,** *Circulation Director*
Doris Ridley, Carolyn Wimmer, *Executive Assistants* **Jamie L. Kolton, Adam Langley, Ian Slatter,** *Staff Assistants*

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly (except for combined issues dated July 6-July 13, Aug. 10-Aug. 17, Nov. 30-Dec. 7, and Dec. 28-Jan. 4) by News America Incorporated, 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 96153, Washington, DC 20090-6153; changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Yearly subscriptions, $78.00. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-303-776-3605 for subscription inquiries. Visa/MasterCard payment accepted. Cover price, $3.50. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage and handling). Send manuscripts and letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The Weekly Standard Advertising Sales Office in Washington, DC, is 1-202-293-4900. Advertising Production: Call Natalie Harwood, 1-610-293-8540. Copyright 1998, News America Incorporated. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a trademark of News America Incorporated.

BPA INTERNATIONAL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those Wacky Republicans

What an interesting reaction was elicited by the Republican decision last week finally to air some anti-Clinton ads. The Scrapbook has always hewed to the view—call it eccentric—that if you think the president of the United States may be unfit to hold his high office, and if impeachment hearings in the House are imminent, and if congressmen might have to vote on this question rather soon—then it is not inappropriate to take the occasion of a national election to make mention of the fact. At the *New York Times*, on the other hand, the GOP decision to air the ads was instead a decision "to inject the scandal into the closing debate." Discussion of executive-branch malfeasance is apparently, according to the *Times*, a risky topic for public consumption. And God forbid that our elections might be sullied by partisanship!

And what was it, incidentally, that was being debated before the untimely injection? Oh yes, the "host of consequential issues" on which the *New York Times*/CBS News voter survey, conducted a week before Election Day, showed the Democrats running ahead. The nerve of those Republicans, trying to change the subject away from "consequential issues" like health care to frivolous ones, like the third impeachment inquiry in the history of the nation.

According to the front-page story accompanying the polling data, the Democrats were all over the Republicans "like ugly on ape," as George Bush (not the Texas governor with all the good press) used to say. But the data themselves told a different story: Republicans led Democrats in a "usual turnout" situation 48 percent to 43 percent. And in a "low turnout" situation (which many analysts predict) Republicans led by a striking 51 percent to 41 percent.

But you didn't see that on the first page. You had to hunt for it in a chart printed at the bottom left of page 24.

News Flash

The perfidy of the Religious Right apparently knows no bounds. According to a story on the Reuters wire last week, a new report from a pro-choice group in New York known as the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy has uncovered a shocking fact about the National Right to Life Committee: "Religious conviction pervades its work."

Pro-life political activity was previously thought to be a bastion of secularism. Next thing you know, those dangerous right-wing theocrats will be insisting that Congress have a chaplain and begin its sessions with a prayer.

The Return of April Oliver

The Young Members Committee of the National Press Club hosted a panel discussion the other week on "Getting and Keeping Your Dream Job." Seth Gitell, national editor of the *Forward*, wandered in and called up The Scrapbook to relate the experience. The marquee speaker, it turns out, was none other than April Oliver, the TV producer fired by CNN earlier this year for the "Tailwind" report—aired on June 7 and retracted on July 2—which claimed falsely that U.S. Army Special Forces employed nerve gas on a mission to eliminate defectors during the Vietnam War.

First to speak were a public-relations man, a magazine reporter, and a producer for a broadcast wire service. All told straightforward tales of professional advancement and offered their young listeners standard encouragement. Then Oliver—who warned that she had to choose her words carefully because of pending litigation—took the floor to read prepared remarks.

"I really did think I had a dream job in Washington," she said of her work at CNN. "I felt my job was one of the few places in journalism where we didn't feel ratings pressure." Once she started researching the Tailwind story, though, she encountered nothing but obstacles. Doors slammed in her face. "I was the wrong age. I was the wrong sex. I even received a death threat," she said. "It's an age-old tactic of warfare: Kill the messenger."

Yeah, right. It's an age-old tactic when reporters screw up a story: Blame anything and everything but their own poor judgment. And speaking of judgment, where was the press club's? After Oliver finished, the panel's moderator observed, "We can all face this situation at some time. To know the actual story" of Oliver's experience was helpful. Some aspects of the "actual story," however, were ruled out of bounds. The moderator cut off audience questions about the journalistic integrity of Oliver's treatment of Tailwind, saying, "Tonight, on the merits of the report, I'd really like it if you can keep it limited to your dream job," and adding, with surreal irrelevance, that Oliver "is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a mother of a very young child right now." Now that's a real dream job.

The Pentagon Papers, cont'd.

It has now been eight months since Clinton appointees at the Defense Department leaked confidential information from Linda Tripp's security file in an effort to embarrass her—and possibly get her fired. It has been eight months, too, since the Pentagon's inspector general promised a report on the matter. We are still waiting.

One congressman who is particularly exercised about the department's dereliction is Gerald Solomon, the chairman of the Rules Committee who is retiring this year. In a letter to Dennis Hastert, chairman of a House subcommittee on national security, Solomon sought to ensure that Congress would keep an eye on the Tripp case. He said that he was "extremely concerned" that Clinton officials had committed crimes, adding that he was "troubled by the actions taken by the Office of the Inspector General." That office promised Congress a report in July. It reneged, citing "external factors"—probably an allusion to Kenneth Starr's look at the matter and indictments that may ensue from it. The dirty trick played by the "most ethical administration in history" on a government employee, Tripp, should not go down the memory hole. Solomon, perhaps alone, seems to understand this.

Vouchers Work!

The American Federation of Teachers freaked out last week at the good news that low-income children in New York City who attend private schools under a scholarship program have improved their performance and outpaced their public-school peers in reading and math. "Although voucher advocate Paul Peterson claims that he's offering evidence that vouchers work," the union whined, "what he really seems to have discovered is that small class size works. . . . President Clinton did the right thing in making smaller classes for public school students the centerpiece of his education program. Now we need to get to work making smaller classes a reality, especially for our poorest children."

Nice try at changing the subject. But Peterson, a Harvard professor who says vouchers are promising but need more research, was no hired gun. He collaborated with Mathematica Policy Research, a nonpartisan organization that also does research for the Department of Education. "We implemented the study and collected and analyzed the data," says project director David Myers. "We have no ax to grind." Peterson also found that the scholarship kids do not get all the breaks. They succeeded in spite of the fact that the private schools they attend are less likely to offer facilities like a library, cafeteria, nurse's office, counselors, and special programs for non-English speakers or students with learning disabilities. And class sizes are a red herring with no clear correlation with achievement.

Parental choice, small surprise, can improve student achievement. The writing's on the wall, but maybe the unions are having a hard time reading it.

Help Wanted

Contributing editor David Frum is looking for a research assistant for a four-month stint beginning immediately. Please send a résumé, references, and salary requirements to: David Frum, 1101 17th Street, NW, Suite 608, Washington DC 20036.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Casual

My Me Decade

I was at dinner with a tableful of Washington journalists—eight right-wingers and a leftist. The drunkest of the conservatives, at a cruising altitude of five or six cocktails, asked his colleague how he'd wound up on the left.

"It was in the 1970s," Lefty replied. "I was living in New York with some artist friends. Like many at the time, we were questioning social relations—"

Drunkie, who took this explanation in a narrow sexual sense, interrupted Lefty with a bon mot so filthy that (a) my editors won't print it and (b) Lefty will probably never "question social relations" again as long as he lives.

Having grown up in the 1970s, I'm used to Drunkie's disdain for the decade. I even share it. What's stunned me lately is the attitude of the young. They *love* the seventies—its inflation, oil shocks, meltdowns, mass suicides, and (especially) disco and pornography. There's a kid at the magazine who peppers me with questions: "What's a 'key party'? Did you ever O.D.? Did you have a disco suit? Did you protest the war?" He feels like he missed it all.

I explain that, having been 17 when the decade ended, I missed it, too—at least the stuff *he's* interested in. I didn't know what a key party was until I saw *The Ice Storm* last year, and never O.D.'d until *well* into the 1980s. I never got a disco suit, either, although that can hardly have been a matter of taste. Photos of my freshman formal in 1977 show me in a pistachio-colored rent-a-tux with Liberace-style ruffles bubbling out from in between the lapels. I'm beaming into the camera, bangs hanging down to eyebrow level. (These photos have been stored in a numbered safe-deposit box in a Swiss bank.)

Protest the war? What war? The War on Inflation? Our only act of civil disobedience consisted of making fake I.D.s. The drinking age was then 18, a huge injustice; it should have been 12. If a 12-year-old can fight and die for his country in, ah . . . in a few years, then, ah . . . why can't he drink until he throws up all over someone else's parents' living-room sofa?

I never had any war stories for Missed-It-All until the other day. He asked, "Did you ever go to Studio 54?"

I'd forgotten: *Yes, I did!* Freshman year, a bunch of us went to New York for the weekend and wound up at the house of a woman who lived in my dorm. She was slender, elegant, rich as Croesus, and thick as two short planks; she'd got into college because her father was thinking of building the school a boathouse. At 1 A.M., she said, "Let's go to Studio!"

In line, I wore a Harris tweed over a heavy fisherman's sweater. The jacket had fit me about a growth spurt ago; now it was so tight I had to unbutton the thing to get my cigarettes out of the breast pocket. I must have looked like an ottoman. I remember that because I clashed so badly with everyone around me, in their Mohawks and their leather pants and acetate ties. The bouncer wouldn't have let me in in a million years. But he recognized Two Short Planks, and we got in as a group, at 15 bucks apiece.

There were lights flashing, and Michael Jackson's "Rock With You" was playing. My friends looked for cocaine. The bartenders, all men in Speedo trunks, were making out with one another. Debbie Harry (of the band Blondie) was sprawled on a couch. I saw a disheveled girl in the corner who seemed as clueless as me. We danced. I, white teenager that I was, tried that mime of cross-country skiing that passed for dancing in our set. When Disheveled turned on her heels and left I realized I'd been wrong. About her being as clueless as me, I mean.

If the seventies was about making the elite excesses of the sixties available to the masses, then Studio 54 wasn't the seventies. It was an *escape* from the seventies, a haven for those who wanted to keep libertinism an exclusive thing. They had me there: *I* couldn't afford 5 bucks for a beer. So I left Two Short Planks and my other friends behind and walked east into Midtown where an Irish bar was open.

"I.D.?" the barman said.

My fake I.D. consisted of a 2-by-3-inch rectangle I'd cut out of a manila folder. In one corner I'd stuck a photo of myself standing in front of some azaleas in our backyard the previous spring. I'd colored in another corner with black magic marker, typed IOWA ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE SOCIETY over it in crumbling Wite-Out, then a date of birth from sometime during the Boer War.

The barman just laughed. "Yo, Mike!" he yelled down the bar. "Get a load of this." Mike, the manager, looked at my I.D. and laughed till he cried. He called the waitresses over. He passed it around to other patrons. Then he walked up to where I was sitting with my head in my hands and said, "You're too much, kid. The beer's on me." It being the seventies and all.

Christopher Caldwell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Correspondence

No Cheer in the GOP

William Kristol has put his finger on important elements of a key point I make from time to time to friends in politics ("Cheer Up!" Oct. 26). I used to say that the GOP does not have a real majority because it does not have the press. But I can put it another way: Until the GOP learns (as a party and as individual lawmakers and candidates) the lessons of public relations and the proficient use of television, it will be far less effective and may never be, as Kristol points out, "a serious national governing party."

The strategic budget cave-in to get out of town was acceptable because the GOP cannot count on the press—and it was more important to get back home to the voters than to risk being blamed for a shutdown. Tax cuts and school reform, two perfect issues for the GOP because of their immediacy, have again fallen by the wayside because Republicans do not know how to use the electronic media.

This country cannot be "nationally governed" without great skill at using these means of communication. Even in the current situation, with talk radio dominated by conservative hosts and news channels on cable like Fox News and MSNBC bringing a certain balance, as long as reporters are liberal and broadcast with "ignorant credulity" the spurious claims of the Clinton administration, then conservatives and Republicans and Christians—anyone who is not hip and liberal—will be at a huge disadvantage.

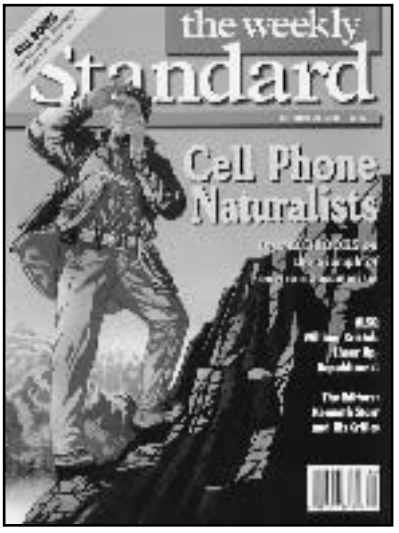
We have come a long way when people like Howard Fineman and other liberals say what they do about Clinton, but now, often in apparent attempts at "fairness" rather than simple accuracy, anchors and reporters discuss with seriousness the "spin" of Democrats. In fact, the ability to discuss and reason has been so poisoned by this president that his impeachment is necessary not just to restore truthfulness to our national discussions, but to achieve an even larger goal: Impeaching Bill Clinton might finally rescue our country from the debilitating effects of 40 years of the moral relativism—imbued in almost every college graduate—which has allowed this president and his minions to spin with impunity in the first place.

T. Harding Jones
New York, NY

Baby Killer and a Marxist

Wesley J. Smith's review of *Ethics Into Action* by Peter Singer passed over—as have other reviews—the important fact that Singer's ethics are essentially Marxist ("Killing Babies and Saving Halibut," Oct. 26).

One of Singer's first books was about Marx. The preamble to his *Practical Ethics* is laced with Marxist concepts, though they are carefully camouflaged by utilitarianism. Utilitarian Marxists—that is, practical Marxists such as



Lenin, Stalin, Castro, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot—all share one ethic: They have never shied away from killing innocent people in order to achieve their goal of "equality."

Singer's discovery of animal liberation originates with the famous article "On the Jewish Question" in which Marx invented the much quoted and romantic idea of man as a "species-being." To think of humans as a species, rather than as humans, makes it possible for Singer to level nature's playing field and think of humans as animals and animals as humans.

Singer's practical ethics are indeed practical: no need to be consistent, just think up practical reasons based upon Marxist ideas copiously mixed with popular liberal views to justify killing innocents who present a problem to the living, or to themselves.

Graeme Newman
Albany, NY

Show Me a Winner

I must bring to Fred Barnes's attention another exception to his rule of thumb in politics: "Show me a Republican who lost in 1994, and I'll show you a loser" ("Sweet Day for Sauerbrey," Oct. 26).

In Texas in 1994, Pete Sessions lost to a liberal Democrat, John Bryant, by a heartbreaking 3,300 votes in one of the closest congressional races in the country. Bryant, seeing the handwriting on the wall, then chose to seek his party's Senate nomination in 1996 for a chance to run against Sen. Phil Gramm (he was beaten in the primary by a virtual unknown, Victor Morales).

In 1996, Sessions, the Republican, won the fifth district in Texas. During his freshman term, he has distinguished himself as having one of the most conservative voting records in Congress. Sessions has also helped raise over $200,000 this election cycle for Republican congressional candidates as an NRCC Executive Committee member. Moreover, in my opinion, Sessions is arguably the most popular elected official with the grassroots in Dallas County. As evidence of his strength, the Democrats have not even targeted his district as a possible pick-up this year, even though they have a candidate who is a proven vote-getter (none other than Victor Morales).

Jill Mellinger
Dallas, TX

The Weekly Standard
welcomes letters to the editor.
Letters will be edited for length and clarity and must include the writer's name, address, and phone number.
All letters should be addressed:
Correspondence Editor
The Weekly Standard
1150 17th St., NW
Washington, DC 20036.
You may also fax letters: (202) 293-4901.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the weekly Standard

A Crooked President

On two recent Mondays, October 19 and 26, U.S. District Judge Susan Webber Wright began to make public the documentary record of *Jones* v. *Clinton*, the epic litigation her court has supervised for more than four years. Further such releases are promised. What Judge Wright has unsealed so far—fewer than 1,700 pages—is but a single drop of water in the great ocean of paper the case has washed up. Read straight through, however, even this initial disclosure leaves an indelible impression of presidential perfidy. A couple of examples will suffice.

First, on the question of "leaks."

During the final months of 1997, lawyers for Clinton and his co-defendant, Danny Ferguson, pursued an aggressive discovery strategy designed to produce evidence damaging to Paula Jones's reputation. Nearly all the dirt-digging was performed by presidential lawyer Bob Bennett and his private investigators. The Clinton camp catalogued all the rumors. It tracked down and interviewed all the witnesses—and arranged for them to be deposed.

But at those formal depositions, it seems, for the sake of appearances, the actual questioning was conducted—with the prompting of scribbled notes passed his way from a silent Bennett—by Danny Ferguson's attorney, Bill Bristow. Bristow is a man of uncommon crudeness. "Did she say there was anything she noticed about his d— other than that it was crooked?" he asked Paula Jones's sister, Lydia Cathey, at a session on October 14, 1997. "I mean, did it have a—did she describe which way it was crooked? Did it have a U-turn in it?"

Wait, it gets better. The Bennett/Bristow team appears to have reached its apogee of vulgarity and nastiness nine days after the Cathey proceeding, on October 23, 1997. That afternoon, at a Little Rock law firm and in the presence of Paula Jones, they took testimony from one Dennis Kirkland, an extremely shady character expelled from college for cocaine use and later convicted of forgery. Over the course of his deposition, according to the partial transcript included in Judge Wright's October 26 release, Kirkland claimed, at minimum, to have had a sexual encounter with Jones in 1987.

What more he claimed about this encounter can be inferred from contemporaneous press reports and from an emergency protective-order motion Jones's attorneys filed on November 3, 1997. Almost immediately following Kirkland's testimony, national reporters began receiving telephone tips, naming Kirkland, about allegations that Paula Jones had once "performed specific sex acts upon five men together in the cab of a Chevrolet van." Who might have issued these disgusting and dubious hints—in violation of court-enforced secrecy rules?

We no longer need rely exclusively on common sense for our answer. In March of this year, after an account of the president's own *Jones* deposition was published in the *Washington Post* and Clinton spokesmen began ostentatiously protesting "leaks," Judge Wright entered a confidentiality order governing all discovery proceedings in the case. The ruling obliged every attorney involved to file a sworn affidavit with the court reporting how he had handled discovery evidence—and with whom he had shared it. Every attorney did so report. All of them assured the judge that the material had been narrowly and strictly guarded.

All of them, that is, except Bob Bennett, who acknowledged having given transcript copies of the president's deposition to various people *not* "of record" in the litigation: Clinton attorneys David Kendall and Mickey Kantor, for example, and the White House counsel's office. Bennett also acknowledged having discussed Paula Jones's deposition with these same people. And—this part is particularly relevant to the Kirkland deposition—to have "provided," "shown," or "disclosed" to unidentified "other counsel to the president" certain further, unspecified "discovery materials that are under seal in this case."

The president, in other words, through his lawyers and other representatives and confederates, is almost certainly guilty of the very leaks he has made such a show of decrying.

Bob Bennett figures, too, in a second major Jones/Lewinsky pseudo-mystery clarified by Judge Wright's latest document release: the circumstances by which the Secret Service came to assert a novel "protective-function" privilege against testimony con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cerning the president. When the existence of this legally threadbare claim first came to light, this past spring, the privilege was thought to have been invented in response to inquiries by the Starr grand jury. The White House, for its part, denied all participation in the "protective-function" argument; the matter, they insisted, was being handled exclusively by the Justice and Treasury departments—in the long-term interest of the presidency as an institution. And the current president, Bill Clinton himself, proclaimed total ignorance of the issue. All he knew about the "protective-function privilege," he suggested, was what he read in the newspaper.

This, surely, was another lie. Because it now turns out that the Secret Service claim predated the Starr grand jury by several months and had originally been cobbled together for use in the *Jones* litigation. On December 23, 1997, Paula Jones's attorneys served subpoenas on four Secret Service officials. Judge Wright seems to have learned about these subpoenas on December 30 from Bob Bennett, who was then intensively preparing the president for his forthcoming *Jones* deposition. "Mr. Bennett states," according to the clerk's minutes of an *in camera* hearing that day, "that the plaintiff has served subpoenas on the Secret Service and the security detail at the White House."

And Mr. Bennett also made plain that he—Bill Clinton's private lawyer—had conferred with the government on how it would reply. Bennett, the clerk went on, "anticipates that the Justice Department will file a motion to quash." Which is exactly what the Justice Department proceeded to do, requesting that Judge Wright recognize a "protective-function privilege."

Perjury by the president. Obstruction of justice by the president's friends and aides. Illegal dissemination, by the president's agents, of court-protected discovery evidence. Abuse of power through the manipulation of executive-branch agencies, in the president's name, for his purely personal benefit in civil litigation. What is the nation to do when confronted with such a frontal challenge to its laws—by its leader?

We turn here for guidance to one of America's most renowned historians. What is "unique in the history of the presidency" about this scandal, he writes, is the "long list of potential *criminal* charges" it involves. "Even before the various investigations were concluded," it appeared likely that the president and his allies "had engaged in a multitude of indictable activities": among others, "in perjury, in subornation of perjury, in obstruction of justice, in destruction of evidence, in tampering with witnesses, in misprision of felony"—and in "conspiracy to involve government agencies" in a subsequent cover-up. All of which, now proved beyond doubt, means that the president himself has "conspired against the basic processes of democracy."

Such transgressions, this distinguished scholar continues, must not be "forgiven and forgotten for the sake of the presidency," but rather "exposed and punished for the sake of the presidency." Excessive "respect for the office" should not deter us from pursuing justice this way. "I would argue that what the country needs today is a little serious disrespect for the office." Nor should we be satisfied with watered-down, "slap-on-the-wrist" alternatives. Censuring the president for the crimes in question is "not enough," since "the continuation of a lawbreaker as chief magistrate would be a strange way to exemplify law and order at home or to demonstrate American probity abroad." No, "in the end," our two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning professor sadly concludes, only "the decisive engine of impeachment" is appropriate.

Thus, Harvard's Arthur Schlesinger Jr. In his 1973 book *The Imperial Presidency*. Discussing Richard Nixon.

Nowadays, of course, Schlesinger makes headlines for ignoring his own past arguments and leading an ad-hoc coalition of nearly 500 American historians in exactly the opposite direction. He and they, in an irrational and oddly ahistorical open letter, announce that reverence for "the presidency" must be our paramount concern in the current impeachment inquiry—and warn that the Oval Office will be "permanently disfigured and diminished" if Clinton is convicted for many of the same felonies Schlesinger once so eloquently charged to Nixon. Simply because they are "about sex," apparently, this president's crimes do not qualify as momentous public business. They can be cleanly dealt with, Schlesinger explains, through the mild and "obvious solution" of a "resolution of censure."

The hypocrisy is really too much to stomach. And the suspicion grows that for Arthur Schlesinger and others of his class and type, no president is impeachable unless he is first proved guilty of membership in the Republican party.

Here at THE WEEKLY STANDARD, we no longer much care what party Bill Clinton belongs to. And we have never much cared that his crimes are "about sex." They could be about a lemon meringue pie, and the nation's problem would remain just as severe. The president of the United States is a deliberate and unrepentant perjurer—a man who has thus demonstrated bottomless contempt for the rule of law.

When the House and Senate return to Washington from their current recess, no matter what happens in this week's election, they must impeach Bill Clinton and remove him from office. Anything less, as Arthur Schlesinger once understood, will be "a cop-out and a betrayal of Congress's constitutional responsibility."

—David Tell, for the Editors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John Conyers's Circus

by Tucker Carlson

Detroit

Rep. John Conyers knows what it's like to have a Monica in the workplace. Ten years ago, the Detroit congressman began a relationship with a 23-year-old aide named Monica Ann Esters. In June 1990, Conyers, then 61, married Esters, who was eight months pregnant. Though his office is relatively small, Conyers had managed to keep the affair secret, and when reporters called his other aides seeking comment on the marriage, no one on his staff admitted to knowing anything about it. We were out of the loop, they said.

There are differences, of course. For one thing, Conyers made an honest woman out of his Monica. (Although not before enduring a degree of public humiliation: Conyers's new wife, more than one person pointed out, was born the year he was first elected to Congress.) In the years since, Conyers, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has said little about his courtship of his former employee, though recently he has had quite a bit to say about another, more famous office romance.

Kent Lemon

John Conyers

Two weeks ago a press release crossed my desk announcing that Conyers planned to convene a panel of "experts on the law, the media and politics" to discuss the impeachment inquiry. Sounds worth covering, I thought, and I called Conyers's office for more information. The woman who answered the phone seemed strangely enthusiastic to hear from me. "Wonderful," she said at the end of our brief conversation. "Let me give you a fax number so you can send your bio." My bio? "Yes, we like to have biographical statements from all the panelists. That way we can introduce you correctly."

I didn't argue, and within an hour, a fax arrived. "Congressman Conyers is delighted that you have accepted his invitation to participate as a panelist," it began. A week later I found myself on the 13th floor of a municipal building in downtown Detroit wearing a name tag and meeting my fellow panelists: a couple of ACLU lawyers, several oppression-studies professors from Midwestern universities, former White House counsel Abner Mikva, and NOW president Patricia Ireland. It didn't take long to figure out why I'd been invited. "I guess you're the token," Ireland said as we took our seats.

True to the night's theme ("The Clinton Impeachment Inquiry: Smokescreen for the Do-Nothing 105th Congress"), Conyers began by attacking Republicans for using impeachment as a smokescreen to hide the fact they haven't done anything recently. A number of other panelists followed with statements making the same point, some more theatrically than others. Mikva noted that Republicans are bad and Clinton is good. Patrick Keenan, a professor at the University of Detroit, began by declaring himself "irate" and proceeded to become even more so. Within a short time, Keenan was imploring the audience to "rise up." "I don't want to be ashamed to be an American any longer!" he shouted.

After an hour of this, I was beginning to feel light-headed. By the time a retired law professor and self-described poet named Harold Norris rose to begin his harangue, I knew I couldn't take much more. Norris's points were simple enough—the Clinton investigation is a witch hunt, and anyone who thinks it isn't is evil—but unfortunately he kept forgetting that he'd made them. So he made them again. And again. Desperate, I waited for him to pause for breath, then began applauding: Thank you, Professor Norris.

Norris looked up, confused, but only momentarily. He shuffled his notes and began again—as always, from the beginning. ("This is a low point in American constitutional history. This is a defamation of our rule of law . . .") Patricia Ireland leaned over, grinning. "You can't be mean to old people," she said in a stage whisper. "It's always a losing proposition." I know, I said, but you don't understand. He was rude to me at the reception. He's a pretty nasty old guy. "As nasty as [Republican representative] Linda Smith?" she asked.

Ireland is never far from her talking points, and since I was sitting next to her, I got to read them. "Don't defend B.C.," she had written at the top of a piece of hotel stationery. "What he did Indefensible." The Republican Congress, she had reminded herself in large ballpoint letters, is "Extremely Partisan."

Not surprisingly, Ireland's subsequent remarks ("I am not here to defend Bill Clinton; what he did was indefensible") sounded a lot like her notes, which read

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a lot like most of her speeches. Which, in this setting, made her sound a lot like a moderate.

Ireland, in fact, was one of the few people in the room to suggest that Clinton might have done something wrong. Perjury? Obstruction? "Low misdemeanors, if they are anything at all," scoffed Abner Mikva. "If there's going to be any impeachment," said the Rev. Wendell Anthony, head of the NAACP's Detroit office and a recent guest at the White House prayer breakfast, "it ought to start with the Supreme Court." The Supreme Court? That's right, said Anthony. Turns out there are hardly any minority clerks. And that's both a high crime *and* a misdemeanor.

The mostly black crowd hooted approval at Anthony's remarks, as it did when he explained that a nation as racist as America—a country that imprisons black men solely because they are black—has no right to cast judgment on a president as committed to black causes as Bill Clinton, a president who "has spent more time in the nation of Africa than all the presidents heretofore put together." On the other hand, Anthony implied, maybe there's a connection. Maybe they're going after Clinton because he stands up for black folks. Maybe it's payback.

Maybe? No maybes about it, thundered former *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Vernon Jarrett. "I am saturated with the consciousness of being African American," Jarrett explained, and "much of this *is* a right-wing conspiracy." In other words, a white conspiracy. A white racist conspiracy.

"Amen!" cheered the crowd. "That's right!"

At about this point, a pounding sound echoed through the PA system. Conyers's two sons, ages two and eight, had crawled into his lap and were playing with the microphone. The panel was still taking questions from the audience, but it seemed a good time to leave. A couple of other panelists got the same idea, and we headed out. William Miller, a good-natured law professor who teaches at Michigan, offered me a ride to the airport. A sexual-harassment expert from the University of Wisconsin joined us, and as we walked to Miller's minivan the two academics mulled over the symbolic meaning of the Lewinsky scandal. ("In a sense, they've turned him into a woman," the harassment expert said, "sexualized him so they can negate his leadership. It's very problematic.")

I'd talked to Miller earlier in the night and pegged him as a conventional liberal, smarter than most, and witty, but socially progressive and distrustful of the Right—a garden-variety Clinton voter. That's how he'd seemed then. He seemed a lot different after three hours of pro-Clinton reeducation.

Actually, Miller explained once we got on the highway, "I can't stand the guy." Miller is something of an expert on dislike (his study of repugnance, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, was published last year), and he has an enormous and precise vocabulary for describing distaste. On the topic of Clinton, it failed him. The idea of voting for Clinton, Miller said, "makes me feel like I'm going to throw up."

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer for THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

FREE-TRADE NATIONALISM

by Brink Lindsey

FREE TRADE IS LOSING ITS GRIP on the conservative movement. In recent years a growing minority of conservatives, led by Patrick Buchanan, has swung to the opposite end of the spectrum and embraced outright protectionism. Less noticeably, others on the right who remain opposed to raising new trade barriers have grown disenchanted with trying to remove existing ones.

The September 25 House vote on "fast track" trade-negotiating authority tells the story. The GOP leadership pushed for a vote before the midterm elections, claiming that Republicans would carry the measure even in the face of overwhelming Democratic opposition. They didn't even come close: The bill went down 243-180, with roughly a third of the Republican caucus voting against the party line.

What's happening here? Why are conservatives running away from a cause that promotes tax cuts and deregulation? One explanation is that conservatives are being asked to choose between their nationalism and their free-market economics. It's a false dilemma: The conflict arises not from the nature of free trade, but from the way it has been packaged and pursued.

For over six decades, trade liberalization has served as the handmaiden of an internationalist foreign policy. This association goes back to the New Deal, when, in the aftermath of the disastrous Smoot-Hawley tariff, FDR's secretary of state Cordell Hull masterminded and pushed through the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934. Previously, setting tariff levels had been a matter of domestic economic policy; now it became the subject of international negotiations. Hull and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other New Dealers who pulled off this transformation did so not out of love for free markets generally; their aims were primarily diplomatic. In the international arena, they saw open markets as a way of promoting peaceful relations in an increasingly hostile world.

After World War II, free trade was integrated into the larger strategy of containing Soviet communism. By increasing our commercial ties with Europe and Japan, trade agreements fortified the solidarity of the Western alliance. And by opening our markets to Third World countries, we hoped to prevent defections to the Soviet camp.

The Cold War is over, but U.S. support for trade liberalization continues to be sold as an obligation of American "international leadership." Fast track in particular tends to get lumped together with calls for additional IMF funding and paying back U.N. dues, mixed in with grousing about know-nothing members of Congress who don't even have passports.

It's not just that free traders have sold their cause on foreign-policy grounds. By promoting trade liberalization exclusively in the context of international negotiations, they have actually conveyed the impression that free trade requires the subordination of the U.S. national economic interest to broader concerns. After all, in trade talks countries agree to reduce their trade barriers only on the condition that other countries do likewise. Thus, trade barriers are treated like nuclear missiles in arms-control talks—prized strategic assets that are given up only in exchange for foreign assets of equivalent value. (Indeed, in the parlance of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, a commitment to reduce tariffs is a "concession.")

With the issue so framed, the military metaphors proliferate. Trade "hawks" argue that our relatively open markets amount to "unilateral disarmament," and they urge that we close off access to U.S. markets unless foreign countries let in more American goods. Free traders, by resisting such calls, get cast as "doves."

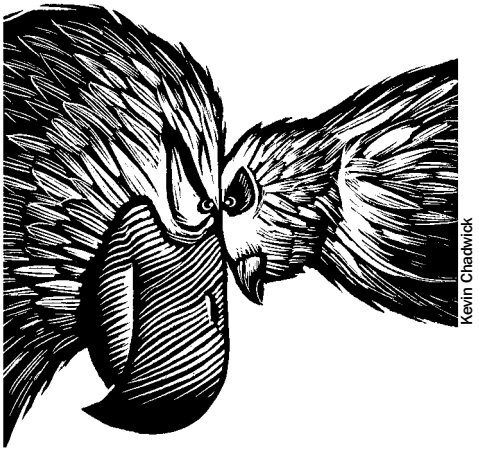
Of course, the equation of trade with war is economic nonsense. Trade, unlike war, is not a zero-sum game: One country doesn't "win" at another's expense. In particular, openness to foreign competition is not a vulnerability. On the contrary, it allows a country's citizens to enjoy the best goods and services the world has to offer, and to specialize in those pursuits at which they are relatively more productive. And the benefits of open markets accrue regardless of whether other countries maintain similarly liberal policies.

Nevertheless, free traders have seldom challenged the protectionist misconceptions that trade talks encourage. By and large they accept the notion that the United States is somehow at a disadvantage because most of our trading partners maintain higher trade barriers than we do. Their position is that America is strong enough to "win" at international trade even with the deck stacked against us; and anyway, they argue, broader geopolitical interests—countering Soviet power, and now maintaining some kind of nebulous "influence"—outweigh narrow commercial concerns. Thus, by the twisted logic of trade negotiations, free traders appear to be asking the United States to play by less favorable rules than other countries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Furthermore, the direction of trade negotiations in recent years suggests a connection between free trade and the progressive diminution of U.S. national sovereignty. The scope of trade agreements has broadened far beyond simple tariff-cutting to encompass sweeping forays into traditional domestic-policy areas. In particular, efforts to "harmonize" national policies on labor and the environment are working their way onto negotiating agendas at both the regional and multilateral levels. And to enforce these increasingly ambitious agreements, new and more powerful international institutions—most notably, the World Trade Organization—have been created and empowered to pronounce judgment on national laws' fidelity to international obligations.

During the twilight struggle with communism, conservatives suppressed their normal nationalist sensibilities in deference to the greater cause. Now that the Cold War has ended, though, it's not surprising that a growing number of conservatives are ready to throw the free-trade baby out with the internationalist bath water. If trade liberalization is part of a package deal that seemingly sacrifices America's national economic interest and erodes its sovereignty in favor of some incipient world government, then thanks but no thanks. Even many conservatives who know enough economics to reject Pat Buchanan's full-throated protectionism are finding it ever harder to maintain allegiance to the free-trade agenda as currently constituted.


Kevin Chadwick

If free trade is to remain a viable conservative cause, it must be disentangled from its associations with internationalist altruism. Globalization must be distinguished from globalism. To that end, conservative free traders should urge the elimination of U.S. trade barriers as a matter of domestic economic policy—outside the context of any international negotiations and regardless of what other countries choose to do. The case for free trade should be grounded squarely in the U.S. national economic interest.

Although six decades of contrary practice have muddled the issue, free trade is not fundamentally about international agreements or international institutions. And it certainly has nothing to do with IMF bailouts or U.N. mission-creep. Rather, free trade is about freedom—freedom to trade, freedom to choose, freedom from import taxes and government regulation, freedom from subsidizing special interests. Modern conservatism has stood generally for the principle that America's national economic interest lies in greater freedom. A campaign for unilateral trade liberalization would allow conservatives to restore that principle's proper application to trade policy.

Such a campaign would have no shortage of inviting targets: high tariffs and restrictive quotas on food and clothing, the anti-competitive anti-dumping law, the Jones Act ban on foreign shipping between U.S. ports, and foreign-ownership limits on airlines and broadcasting, to name a few. These trade barriers punish American businesses and consumers; they restrict choices and drive up prices; they blunt the forces of competition that promote productivity and rising standards of living. They are a tax on American economic health for the benefit of narrow interests that cannot possibly justify their special immunity to market discipline. The fact that other countries have similar policies or worse is no reason for us to cling to our own folly.

We don't need fast track or the WTO to pursue free trade here at home. We don't need to make excuses for imperfect trade agreements. We don't need to play down obnoxious practices in the countries with which we sign deals. We don't need to answer charges about the loss of sovereignty to faceless international bureaucrats. All we need is to sound the traditional conservative themes of lower taxes and less government.

What about encouraging freer trade in other countries? Don't we need trade negotiations to pry open foreign markets? Actually, most of the countries that have engaged in really sweeping free-trade reforms in recent years—countries like Chile and Argentina, Australia and New Zealand—have done so unilaterally. Interestingly, Mexico belongs on the list as well: Its unilateral market-opening moves in the late 1980s were far bolder than anything Mexico promised under NAFTA. The driving force for reform in all these countries wasn't tough bargaining or the prospect of a quid pro quo but rather the realization that protectionism was causing economic stagnation.

In other words, protectionist countries have changed their policies in order to catch up economically with more open countries. It follows that the most important thing the United States can do to foster liberalization elsewhere is set a good example. Indeed, more than anything else, a consistent and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

principled commitment to open markets on the part of the world's largest and most prosperous economy would enhance the prospects of free trade around the world.

Is there any room left for international negotiations and institutions? I believe there is. Trade agreements can strengthen the political case for freer trade at home by adding the gains from freer trade abroad to the calculus. Also, even when markets are opened unilaterally, converting those reforms into international obligations can guard against backsliding. But to secure these advantages, free traders should first make their case at the national level. The polestar of trade policy ought always to be the American interest in free markets at home.

Many conservative free traders are doubtless reluctant to abandon tried and true approaches for something as novel as unilateral free trade. But the fact is that what may have worked during the Cold War is no longer working. Free trade and conservatism are increasingly at odds, and it's a conflict that threatens both causes. Free-trade nationalism, as strange as it may sound, provides the way out.

Brink Lindsey is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and the director of its Center for Trade Policy Studies.

Starr-Hazing

by Matthew Rees

The House Judiciary Committee is likely to hold its first impeachment hearing on November 16. There's just one problem: Not a single committee Democrat believes the president's behavior is impeachable. So what do they do? Carpetbomb Ken Starr, make life miserable for Republicans, and defend the president.

The early stages of the Democrats' offensive played out last week. On October 27, the committee's senior Democrat, John Conyers, wrote Starr to request a slew of materials, ranging from notes taken during witness interviews to photos of the Monica Lewinsky/Linda Tripp lunch at the Ritz-Carlton. The next day, Starr's deputy, Robert Bittman, responded to this extraordinary request with both a letter and a phone call to Abbe Lowell, the committee's Democratic counsel. Bittman advised that the Office of Independent Counsel would need a few days to respond in full.

> WHEN THE IMPEACHMENT HEARINGS CONVENE, DEMOCRATS ON THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE INTEND TO PUT KENNETH STARR ON TRIAL.

But on October 29, the *Washington Post*—quoting Democratic committee staffers—reported incorrectly that Starr wouldn't consider the request for materials unless it was approved by Judiciary chairman Henry Hyde. This prompted Bittman to send an angry letter to Lowell (whom he blamed for the misrepresentation), saying the *Washington Post* account was "absolutely false, and you know it."

There's every reason to believe that these tactics will intensify when the committee reconvenes after the election. Committee Democrats, in chorus with White House officials, will amplify their complaints that the rules are rigged against them. (They say they want more clarification of the charges against the president and the standards that will be used to judge his conduct.) Another line of attack will be that Starr has been a reckless spender. Last week, a government audit of Starr's office expenses was released, and it noted a strange $56,810 expenditure for a copy machine, plus payments to private investigators. Democrats pounced: "Why is he wasting the taxpayers' money?" asked Jerrold Nadler, the committee Democrat who requested the audit.

But of course, the audit and the procedural matters are not the real issue: Starr's investigation is. Over the past month, journalists have raised questions about Starr's contacts with Paula Jones's attorneys prior to Clinton's January deposition, and committee Democrats have seized on these reports. Four of them have written to Janet Reno requesting information on Starr's activities. Nadler is recommending that reporters read recent op-ed pieces by Richard Ben-Veniste, the Democratic counsel on the Whitewater Committee, and Lars-Erik Nelson, an anti-Starr columnist at the New York *Daily News*. These highly speculative pieces argue that Starr may have been aware of the Linda Tripp tapes earlier than he subsequently let on, that he deceived Reno when he sought to expand his probe's jurisdiction, and that the Judiciary Committee and the Justice Department should investigate him. "If it can be shown that the whole thing was a set-up," Nadler

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me, "then that's something we should look into." A House Democratic staffer acknowledges that these issues loom large, saying, "There's no interest in investigating Starr per se, but rather his methods and his motives, which bear directly on his referral."

This posture, say Republicans, signals that committee Democrats are more interested in savaging the independent counsel than in exploring the president's wrongdoing. An eye-opener for Republicans came on October 21, when they met with the committee's Democratic lawyers, Lowell and Julian Epstein, along with White House attorneys Charles Ruff, Gregory Craig, and David Kendall. During the 90-minute meeting, the White House lawyers dominated the conversation, and it became clear that Lowell and Epstein were there primarily to bolster the Clinton defense. Afterwards, White House representatives and committee Republicans took questions from the press. But no one spoke for the committee's Democrats, indicating to Republicans that the Democrats were content to have the White House speak for them.

Can Democratic unity be maintained? Differences *could* emerge once impeachment hearings are scheduled. The White House would like the hearings to be closed to the public; committee Democrats are likely to prefer that the hearings be open. The White House fears that, if Starr is called before the committee, he will deliver an Oliver North-like performance, tipping public opinion; committee Democrats such as Barney Frank and Martin Meehan have already said they want to question Starr—and Lowell is particularly eager to go after him. Yet with the White House and committee Democrats in total agreement on the one *big* issue—whether the president should be impeached—their differences will in the end prove trivial.

Which is awfully good news for Clinton. As for Republicans, they will have to put up with feverish committee Democrats, who will protest every Republican move and do everything else in their power to distract, disrupt, and divert. The Democrats will then denounce the hearings as a circus—and thanks to the Democrats, what there'll be is . . . a circus.

Matthew Rees is a staff writer for **THE WEEKLY STANDARD.**

BLIND TO GIBBON'S CHARMS

by Woody West

I DROPPED BY THE OPTICIAN'S the other day to have my glasses powered up since it seemed the newspaper had begun using a much smaller type to print the boxscores. That fairly routine visit, however, produced a head-on cultural collision that left me shaken. An optician's is not the place, you would think, for that sort of jolt, but daily there are fewer sanctuaries for the traditional.

For decades, in the eyeglass stores I frequented, the placard on which one tested a new prescription—starting with a larger type face that indicated 20/100 acuity—began: "In the second century of the Christian era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind."

In decreasing type size, down to that signifying 20/20, the placard reprinted the masterly cadences of Edward Gibbon's opening in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—"The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valor. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces . . . ," and on.

It was while being fitted for glasses as a teenager that in so unlikely a venue I first encountered Gibbon, and to an adolescent already snared in the web of words those sentences were stunning and grand. The writing was unlike any I had experienced (though even in a middling public high school long ago, we still were half-nelsoned into a decent exposure to the classics of the West). I didn't get far in my first foray after that into Gibbon, a Modern Library abridged version from a secondhand bookstore, as I recall. Over the years I've periodically vowed *this time* to read the entirety of *Decline and Fall* and as regularly have failed to reach even a secondary crest.

It always has been reassuring, though, to find the familiar sentences there on the ophthalmologist's counter, as if suggesting that there were many of us who intended one of these days to make it well beyond that opening paragraph, and that there were firms that appreciated the treasure of Gibbon.

But, then, on this recent visit to the optician's shop, I picked up the reading card—and discovered in horror that Edward Gibbon and decades of tradition, at least my tradition, had vanished. The new sentences on the placard were of a literacy level just a jot above Dick and Jane—cloying, flat, graceless. Only two years ago, during my last prescription adjustment, Gibbon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was still enthroned, and I tested recall rather than vision to see if my long-ago memorization had withstood the ravages of years.

And if vanished from this shop, from all, now or eventually?

Gone without even a line from the manufacturer of the placard, which might have read: "We apologize to customers who were expecting their customary short delight with Mr. Gibbon. But increasingly there have been complaints that he is too difficult, and indeed that our use of these sentences was Eurocentric . . ." Perhaps one of the Stanford undergraduates who marched with Jesse Jackson on campus in the 1980s, chanting, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's got to go," had reached middle management and convinced the timid CEO that he was disturbing the peace by retaining the English historian on the reading card.

I left dispirited. The antidote was to pull Gibbon off the shelf and renew my vow to complete the classic before I was called to "the long account," as a countryman of the historian put it. As it happened, some way into the first volume I encountered Septimius Severus, a general of ability and ambition, of political craft and cruelty. He was emperor for 18 years before his death in 211 A.D. Gibbon writes:

> Falsehood and insincerity, unsuitable as they seem to the dignity of public transactions, offend us with a less degrading idea of meanness, than when they are found in the intercourse of private life. In the latter they discover a want of courage; in the other only a defect of power. . . . [Severus] promised only to betray, he flattered only to ruin; and however he might occasionally bind himself by oaths and treaties, his conscience, obsequious to his interest, always released him from the inconvenient obligation.

It does not require a keen eye, does it, to find contemporary political flavor there?—one of the pleasures if not the principal purpose in reading *Decline and Fall*.

Edward Gibbon will not be diminished by having a few of his sentences excised from opticians' placards. But this sort of "dumbing down" diminishes the rest of us. I can, however, read the boxscores again.

***Woody West is associate editor of the* Washington Times.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Coming Palestinian State

Wye is the bridge to next year's Middle East showdown

By Charles Krauthammer

Occam's Razor is a principle that has served science well for about, oh, 650 years. It holds that the simplest, most parsimonious explanation for a phenomenon is likely to be the correct one. Middle East analysts, however, particularly those with an allergy to Bibi Netanyahu, follow not Occam, but Rube Goldberg. Here is Netanyahu making a historic territorial compromise, and his critics, flummoxed, reach for any explanation, however complicated or unlikely—he is reaching for a new coalition of the Israeli center, he caved in to American pressure (after holding out for two years?), he had a sudden change of heart—except the obvious. At Wye, Netanyahu did exactly what he has said repeatedly he would do: abide by Oslo but withdraw from occupied territory only in return for hard guarantees of Palestinian reciprocity and Israeli security.

You might think that for doing exactly this he'd get perhaps a nod from that universal chorus of Western critics who for two years claimed he was intent on killing the peace process. Not a chance. Instead, one gets the contortions of a Geoffrey Wheatcroft, who rushed to the *New York Times* op-ed pages three days after Wye to criticize Netanyahu for not really being, like Nixon in China, "a sincere zealot at all."

The point is that Netanyahu never was a zealot. He has long believed that a solution to the Palestinian question would require some territorial compromise. He was never a "Land of Israel" ideologue. He would, of course, have preferred to hold on to every inch for security reasons. But he understands realities.

Wye was an exercise in reality. Accordingly, both sides got what they wanted. Netanyahu got reciprocity. Arafat got contiguity. These sound amorphous. They are not. In the epic Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are life and death for each party.

Netanyahu campaigned in 1996 on the premise that the Oslo agreements that his predecessors Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres had negotiated had been giveaways. Yasser Arafat signed lots of paper and delivered nothing. The Palestinian covenant calling for Israel's destruction was not changed. Terrorists ran free in the territories. The Palestinian police force was more than twice its authorized size. Murderers of Israelis were not extradited. The Hamas infrastructure was untouched. (Indeed, Arafat publicly embraced its leadership. Last June, he invited Hamas to join his cabinet.)

Israel's Labor government insisted on continuing down this path of unilateralism on the theory that in the end when peace prevails these promises and security measures will hardly matter because, well, peace will prevail. The interim is just details. Give the Palestinians their dignity through concessions, and that will abate the terrorism by striking at its cause, i.e., the Palestinian grievance.

Rarely has a political theory been so rebutted by events. Under Peres and Rabin, the most generous and accommodating Israeli leaders in Palestinian history, Palestinian irredentism and terrorism were inflamed as never before. More Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks than at any comparable time before or after in Israel's history. So much for a theory of appeasement.

Netanyahu's election was the result. He came into office with a mandate, but it was not a mandate to destroy Oslo. However flawed the agreement, Israel was irrevocably committed. The United States as arbiter and hegemon in the region would not tolerate such an about-face. Netanyahu's strategy therefore was clear from day one: To get out from under Oslo—in particular, from the ruinous "interim" territorial withdrawals—with the least amount of damage.

One needs to stress again how obtuse the Western press has been on this point. It makes much merriment of the idea that Netanyahu, once an opponent of Oslo, has now at Wye become its champion. The fact is that Netanyahu opposed Oslo at its inception as a supremely wrongheaded deal for Israel. But once it had been signed and internationally ratified, no Israeli

Charles Krauthammer is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prime minister could tear it up. His pledge was to conclude Oslo without giving away all of Israel's bargaining chips (such as the West Bank and Palestinian statehood) *before* "final status" talks on the critical existential issues of Jerusalem, borders, water, statehood, and refugees had even begun. That he did at Wye.

II

The "interim phase" as negotiated by Rabin and Peres was one in which Israel would make three "redeployments"—unilateral grants of West Bank territory—after which final-status negotiations would begin. Netanyahu understood that if that were to happen, Israel would have no bargaining chips left when the most crucial issues were to be decided. There would be nothing left to do but give up East Jerusalem, acquiesce to a Palestinian state, allow the influx of huge numbers of Palestinian refugees, and so on. Arafat understood this too. Which is why he kicked and screamed in March 1997 when Netanyahu offered only a token first redeployment. Arafat rejected it out of hand. He demanded 30 percent of the West Bank.

Where did he get that figure? It is written nowhere in Oslo. But clearly he understood from Peres that he would get about a third of the land in each of the three redeployments, giving him just about all the occupied territories by the start of final-status negotiations.

Netanyahu's entire strategy for the last two years, undertaken at huge diplomatic and personal political cost, has been to reduce Arafat's expectations. He had to make Arafat realize that whatever the provocations, whatever the diplomatic damage, however sour Israeli relations with the Arabs, however damaged Israeli relations with the United States, however many rock-throwing and tear-gas incidents this would provoke on the West Bank, Arafat was simply not going to get 90 percent of the land in the interim phase.

On this he won. Wye ratifies the victory. Arafat had 27 percent of the territories when Netanyahu came to power. Wye gives him 13 percent more. Oslo's interim phase will end with Israel having given up 40 percent of the land.

From the Israeli point of view, this is an extraordinary achievement. It leaves Israel with a serious chunk of territory on the West Bank to bargain with.

How did Bibi do it? The three redeployments have essentially been folded into one, the famous 13 percent as demanded by the United States. Formally, the 13 percent counts as fulfilling redeployments numbers one and two. What about number three? Arafat had been pushing very hard for there to be yet another redeployment after Wye. He got that. But Netanyahu got crucial American agreement that its size would be entirely up to Israel, and Netanyahu has indicated that it will be no more than 1 percent, i.e., essentially meaningless.

The other major Israeli gain at Wye was on security. It is a measure of how inept Labor's negotiating of Oslo had been that at Wye the security issues Netanyahu was trying to nail down were precisely the same ones that Rabin claimed he had gotten from Arafat five years ago.

Rabin thought he had secured a change in the PLO charter; five years later the charter had not been changed. He thought he had secured a promise to crack down on terrorism; five years later nothing had been done. He thought he had secured an "end to war" pledge from the Palestinians—matching the "end to war" atmosphere that Sadat had taken back to Egypt from his 1977 visit to Jerusalem; instead, the new official Palestinian media have been sources of egregious anti-Semitic incitement, and the new Palestinian schools raise children on the glories of martyrdom and jihad.

Palestinian reciprocity was essential. But how to get it? Netanyahu's consistent strategy has been that, because Arafat's word is not worth the paper it is written on, the United States would have to be brought deep into the process to make Arafat deliver.

It was a historic gamble. Traditionally, Israelis do not like to bring in third parties. Trilateral negotiations subject them to more pressure, while increasing their dependency and reducing their freedom of action. Nonetheless, Netanyahu understood that no Palestinian promise would be carried out unless the United States demanded it.

He thought he had enlisted the United States with the Hebron agreement of January 1997. At Hebron, he gave up most of Judaism's second-holiest city in return for (a) a host of Arafat promises—these were entirely discounted—and (b) more important, an American "Note for the Record" prepared by Dennis Ross codifying Palestinian obligations.

To Netanyahu's enormous disappointment, Ross's paper turned out to be as worthless as Arafat's. For example, the written U.S. assurance that Israel alone would decide the size of its next redeployment was ignored; the United States instead dictated 13 percent. The change in the Palestinian charter, the cracking down on terrorists, the anti-incitement provisions, all went unfulfilled and unenforced.

What to do? Bring the United States in deeper still. This time, translate American paper into operational CIA oversight over Palestinian actions. What Wye does that Hebron did not is create actual structures on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ground whereby the United States will try to extract real reciprocity.

For example, the Palestinian Authority refuses to extradite terrorists to Israel. It "tries" them itself (the charge for murder is "disturbing the peace"), then either releases them outright or sends them to a revolving-door jail for later release. The CIA will now be involved in this process to ensure that terrorists are sentenced and serve their time. The CIA is also to supervise the Palestinian Authority's seizure of illegal weapons, the reduction of the Palestinian police from 40,000 to 24,000, and the turning over to Israel of a list of the members of the force—as promised five years ago.

This is all very new and all very risky, both for the United States and for Israel. It involves the United States in an internecine conflict at street level. This is Bosnia squared. Nonetheless, the administration took the plausible view that the larger U.S. interest in pushing for peace—or, to put it more realistically, in preventing a total breakdown of the process—warranted the risk.

The risk to Israel is great as well. The CIA's primary function in Israel is to coordinate with Israel in meeting common threats. Now the agency is also to be an arbiter. Mixing the roles of arbiter and collaborator is very difficult and may end up creating debilitating tension between the allied services whenever Israel, as is inevitable, deems the CIA not sufficiently tough on Palestinian terrorism.

Kent Lemon

Yasser Arafat

Nonetheless, again, there is no alternative. If Israel is ever to get reciprocity and real security guarantees under Oslo, it will only be through American involvement. Wye promises reciprocity with teeth.

III

So why are no Israelis dancing in the street? Because what Netanyahu was required to give was enormous too. Arafat's gains are significant, though subtle.

This is Arafat's problem: He wants to declare statehood, but he needs his territory to look like a state if anyone is to take him seriously. In 1988, the Palestinian National Council declared Palestinian independence and the world laughed. He does not want to hear laughter again.

The world laughed because no serious country will recognize a state—in '88 for example, no country of the European Union recognized Palestine—if it does not control territory. Before Oslo, Arafat controlled a few villas in Tunisia. Today Arafat controls real territory. Is it enough to be the basis for statehood?

The 13 percent he gained at Wye is important to him not for the size of the acreage but for the number of isolated islands of Palestinian territory that the 13 percent (mostly unoccupied land) will connect. It will knit together much of the Palestinian archipelago. Contiguity will be given an even more visible face with the connection of Gaza to the West Bank through two "safe passages," i.e., Palestinian roads of the sort that connected West Berlin to West Germany during the Cold War. With Gaza and the West Bank linked, the Palestinian territory will look far more like a state.

Several other of the essential building blocks of statehood were given at Wye. The Gaza airport will soon be open. A seaport will be next. And perhaps most important, Arafat—or was it the U.S. negotiators?—managed to arrange a first: The president of the United States will come to Gaza and address a giant convention of Palestinians, both from the territories and from the diaspora.

This visit was meant as a sweetener to induce Arafat to convene the Palestinian National Council to finally change its national charter to, in effect, recognize Israel. It is not clear whether the PNC will in fact convene and whether, if it does, it will ratify a change in the charter. (Wye vaguely envisions a larger meeting involving unions, women's groups, etc.—all the usual suspects that authoritarian regimes turn out at will—to pack the meeting. Even if this motley crew ratifies some change in the charter, it will mean little: The charter can be amended only by a two-thirds vote of the PNC alone. No matter. The change will be deemed by the United States and the world to have occurred.) What is clear however, is that an American president will come to Palestine to bless its Congress, address a Palestinian festival celebrating coming independence, and launch it on that road.

As a footnote, President Clinton is reportedly plan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ning to take Mrs. Clinton to Gaza. Whether this is a not-so-subtle swipe at Netanyahu for defying American wishes and bringing his wife to Wye, no one will say. Everyone knows, however, that bringing Mrs. Clinton, who quite famously called for a Palestinian state just a few months ago, will be seen by the Palestinians and the world as a signal of the administration's leanings on this heavily freighted issue.

IV

Statehood is *the* issue. On May 4 next year, Arafat will declare a Palestinian state. Is it possible that enormous American pressure or some unexpected event may dissuade him? Yes, but highly unlikely. On statehood, Arafat has gone very far out on a limb. For months he has been telling his people that May 4 is the day. With each passing day, it becomes harder for him to climb off that perch.

At a briefing for columnists just two weeks before Wye, I asked Netanyahu what interest Israel had, if Arafat was shortly going to declare Oslo dead and Palestine a state, in giving Arafat the geographic contiguity and other trappings of statehood in an agreement that would expire—by Arafat's own reckoning—in six months. Would Wye include a Palestinian pledge and an American guarantee that there would be no unilateral declaration of independence?

Netanyahu said statehood would be a "consideration." But unless there is some secret understanding between the United States and Israel on this issue, he failed: There is nothing in the Wye agreement that even mentions statehood. There is a statement that both sides are to refrain from "unilateral actions," but that is boilerplate. Every time Israel shovels dirt in Jerusalem or adds a barn in some West Bank settlement, this is condemned as a "unilateral action." The term has lost any serious meaning. It would be no problem for Arafat to claim that Netanyahu's "unilateralism"—say, beginning construction at Har Homa in Jerusalem—has vitiated the unilateralism clause and therefore there is nothing to restrain Arafat from declaring statehood.

The administration will try to head off such a declaration on May 4. Not because it opposes a Palestinian state. There has already been a change in policy on that. At the 1991 Madrid conference, the United States explicitly declared that it would not support a Palestinian state. Current U.S. policy, however, focuses not on the substance of statehood, but on the manner in which it comes about. The U.S. position is that it should come about only through a negotiated agreement with Israel.

Though its position is much softer now, the administration will want to head off statehood simply because of its potential for danger. A Palestinian unilateral declaration of independence is a guarantee of instability. It will likely bring on some kind of armed conflict, perhaps even a major Middle East war. The United States is terrified of May 4 because it takes everyone into terra incognita, and terra incognita is the last place any policymaker wants to be.

V

In the worst-case scenario—and it is not at all farfetched—when Palestine is declared, all hell breaks loose. First, 150 nations recognize Palestine. Israel is faced with a *fait accompli* and a major setback. After all, just five or ten years ago, Israel's permitting an independent Palestinian state would have been seen as a huge concession for which it deserved something in return—say, the permanent demilitarization of such a state. A unilateral declaration of independence sets no such conditions—no conditions at all—on Palestine. If Israel fails to respond, it will have lost enormous ground. There will therefore be great pressure within Israel to act. And the most obvious and logical thing it could do is annex the 60 percent of the West Bank still under Israeli control.

IN THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO—AND IT IS NOT AT ALL FARFETCHED—WHEN PALESTINE IS DECLARED, ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.

After all, if Oslo is dead, and if each side can unilaterally make its claims, Israel would be wise to claim as much West Bank territory for itself as it can, rather than cede it to an unrestrained Palestine. Israel would be arming itself with a territorial bargaining chip—its last remaining bargaining chip—for the showdown to come.

Next comes the crisis. After all, it would be a Likud dream were the situation to freeze with Arafat having his state on 40 percent of the West Bank and Israel keeping the other 60 percent. This is not Arafat's dream. It is his nightmare. It would settle the Israel-Palestine conflict far more favorably to Israel than anyone might have imagined. Indeed, it corresponds to the outline of a final territorial compromise that someone like Netanyahu, even before Arafat's gains at Oslo, might have been satisfied with.

In such a situation, stability is the last thing Arafat wants. Forty percent is better than what he has now,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but it is still a threadbare state and not very viable. His interest will undoubtedly be to create a crisis. And he creates crisis with violence.

At a recent conference two months ago, a leading Palestinian negotiator envisioned a scenario in which an armed force from Palestine might try to seize the Allenby Bridge crossing. But it need not be anything so dramatic. It could be non-stop intifada-like rioting in a place like Hebron. Or it could be carefully staged Palestinian military pressure on isolated Israeli settlements. (The territorial concessions in the Wye accord leave some half-dozen Israeli settlements isolated behind Palestinian lines and reachable only by access road. These are obvious pressure points.) Israel would be forced to respond militarily.

After that what happens? No one knows. It is hard even to calculate who will have the advantage. Israel will have the tanks. The Palestinians will have the TV cameras. The last time those went up against each other—during the intifada—Israel lost.

Which is why Arafat, who in Jordan and Lebanon and now the West Bank and Gaza has always thrived on crisis, might be tempted. He might even envision the military support of some Arab states. After all, they would now be defending a sovereign brother Arab state, not just intervening in a messy occupation.

Whether or not the Arab states joined the conflict, one thing is certain: The United States would find the situation intolerable. It would of necessity intervene to restrain the conflict. What would come of that? We cannot know because the deck would have been reshuffled in ways that cannot be predicted. But reshuffling the deck would be Arafat's very purpose: It might leave him with more than just a rump state on territory gained at Oslo and Wye.

Next year we will probably look back with nostalgia on the bucolic Middle East represented at Wye, with its casually clad leaders working out the details of peace between bicycle rides. Wye may only be transitional, but its historical import is not to be underestimated. The territorial lines it sets down, together with the elements of statehood it bestows, establish a new baseline. This will supersede such previous baselines as the June 4, 1967 frontiers. As we speak, Wye is setting the groundwork for the coming Palestinian state—and the conflict to follow.

Wye has been disparaged as just an interim arrangement, preparation for "the hard part." The fact is, however, there probably will never be a hard part. The chance that the final-status negotiations now being launched will succeed is practically zero.

One day the fate of Jerusalem, of Palestine, of Israel itself will be decided. Soon. Possibly in the next year. Perhaps in two. But probably, too, by force of arms or by some major shift in the constellation of forces in the region that will cause one side or the other to abandon long-sacred "red lines" and give up its most cherished goals.

That is the crisis waiting to happen. For now, Wye is the bridge to that crisis, the last agreement between Israel and the Palestinians we are likely to see before the fateful showdown. ♦

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Riddle of Ronald Reagan

By Norman Podhoretz

To me, Ronald Reagan always has been, and remains, a mystery. Never—not from the first occasion on which I met him and spent a few hours in his company before he became president; not after talking to him several more times over the years; not after watching him at a distance but with the closest attention during his two terms in the White House; and not after reading a spate of books about him after he left office, including his own memoirs and a half-dozen biographies and volumes of reminiscences by people who had worked closely with him—never in all that time have I shared in the prevalent view that with Reagan "what you saw was what you got": a simple man with a few central beliefs to which he undeviatingly stuck through thick and thin.

AP/Wide World Photos

This is why I have been waiting so eagerly for the publication of Edmund Morris's biography, which was scheduled to come out this fall after 13 years of work but has now been postponed indefinitely. Having been chosen for this task by Reagan himself, who admired his biography of Theodore Roosevelt, Morris had evidently been given unusually free access both to the president and to his papers and records. In various interviews, furthermore, he let it be thought that he had solved the Reagan riddle. But apart from dropping a tantalizing hint or two—for example, that Reagan was seriously slowed down by the attempt on his life early in his first term—Morris was coy about his work-in-progress.

Norman Podhoretz, editor-at-large of Commentary *and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, is the author of the forthcoming memoir* Ex-Friends *(Free Press).*

My guess is that Morris's trouble in completing the book stems from his own inability to decipher the riddle of Reagan—that even (or perhaps especially) after spending so much time observing Reagan, studying him, conversing with him, and thinking about him, Morris has been unable to trace the Jamesian "figure in the carpet" that would make sense of the whole design. Be that as it may, we are still on our own if we wish to grapple with the question that has plagued me since the first time I laid eyes on Reagan and that has continued to bedevil all discussion of the man and his presidency.

Clark Clifford, one of the Democratic "wise men" who because of a financial scandal would pathetically discredit himself after a very long career of shuttling between public office and a private legal practice, had no such problem with Reagan. Either betrayed by his unconscious, or simply forgetting that Walter Lippmann had never been able to live down the column in which he dismissed Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 as "an amiable man . . . who, without any important qualifications for the office, would very much like to be president," Clifford fished up the same patronizing adjective in describing Reagan as "an amiable dunce." In the circles in which Clifford traveled—where Lippmann's unfortunate lapse had evidently also been forgotten—this tag quickly made the rounds and penetrated the thick coating of "Teflon" which otherwise prevented sneers and smears from sticking to this president.

I must confess that my own first impression of Reagan was not so far from Clifford's. I no longer recall exactly what I expected when I arrived at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

private club in New York at which R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., the editor of the *American Spectator*, had arranged a meeting between Reagan and "the intellectuals." The year was 1979, and Reagan was well launched on his second run for the Republican nomination for president. The first time, in 1976, he had been defeated in the primaries by Gerald Ford, who in turn was beaten by Jimmy Carter. But with Carter now in serious trouble over the seizure of American hostages in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, not to mention the calamitous state of the economy, the Republicans had a very good shot in 1980.

I was then still a registered Democrat, but I was also—to use the terminology of that prehistoric political era—a "hard" anti-Communist and a "hawk" on defense. Indeed, almost unthinkable as it now seems to me, I had voted for Carter precisely on those grounds, thinking (foolishly, as it would turn out) that this graduate of Annapolis might at bottom be tougher on defense, more of a "Scoop" Jackson Democrat, than he seemed. In any case, his only Democratic challenger was Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and Kennedy was entirely out of the question. Even setting aside Chappaquiddick (which I and a great many others were not prepared to do), a fascinating irony emerged here that could hardly escape the notice of Democrats like myself who had remained loyal to the anti-Communist interventionism of Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy.

The irony was that the "extreme" conservative Republican Ronald Reagan had by now become closer in his thinking to John F. Kennedy than Kennedy's younger brother Teddy. Putting it even more strongly, Teddy Kennedy was running on policies that were almost the polar opposite of those on which JFK had campaigned against Nixon in 1960 (to "get the country moving again" through a tax cut, a military buildup, and a more forceful stand against Communist expansionism). Reagan's platform, by contrast, was so similar to JFK's that it might have been described (to adapt a phrase from Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid) "not as a choice but an echo." As for Reagan's main Republican rival, George Bush, he was, I thought, just another "country-club Republican" and as such not much more reliable on foreign policy (which was what I most cared about in those days) than Gerald Ford, a devotee of détente, had proved to be.

But there were problems with Reagan as well. About his anti-communism, and his understanding of the need for an American military buildup, there could be no doubt. But was Reagan, the heir of Goldwater, too far to the right to win a presidential election even if he could get the nomination? For that matter, was he too far to the right for unhappy Democrats like me and my fellow cold warriors—such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Eugene V. Rostow, Paul Nitze, Richard Perle, and Richard Pipes? After all, some of us were still resisting the label "neoconservative" by which we were becoming known by practically everyone else and still thought of ourselves as liberals or even as social democrats.

Tyrrell's purpose in arranging for Reagan to meet with "the intellectuals" was to allay some of these anxieties. But as a measure of how great they were, the turnout was very small, several people having refused to attend for fear of becoming labeled Reagan supporters before they had made up their minds. I, on the other hand, was very curious to get a good look at the man in the hope that, given the absence of anyone better, I would be able to root for him with a clear conscience and even at best a whole heart.

When Reagan arrived with his wife Nancy, I was immediately struck (as I often have been when seeing even minor movie actors in the flesh) at how extraordinarily good-looking he was and by the jauntiness of his carriage. As the 10 or so of us present lined up to be introduced, however, it was Nancy who seemed to have a better idea of who we were than he did; he, for his part, comfortably and easily shook everyone's hand without manifesting much interest in or curiosity about what he probably took to be one more group of voters it was his job to win over. If so, he did a lousy job of it. Rather than being reassured, most of us left wondering whether he had any brains at all.

There were two reasons for this. First, Reagan obviously had not a clue as to what to say to this particular group, or even what subjects to talk about. I presumed that if we had been farmers, he would have concentrated on the problems of agriculture; or if we had been businessmen, he would have dwelled on the economy; and so on. But either he had been inadequately briefed, or he had paid less attention than Nancy to what he had been told, or he lacked the elementary intelligence to imagine what intellectuals like us who had been disaffected by the foreign and military policies being pursued by the Democratic party might be interested in hearing him discuss. Whatever the reason, he spent most of the evening telling anecdotes about what he had learned as governor of California.

Instead, then, of bringing up issues like the Soviet military buildup or the hostages in Iran, which he should have known or sensed would be on the minds of people like us, he regaled us with a long account of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how a committee of experienced businessmen he had appointed to do a study of government efficiency in California had found out that legal- rather than letter-size files were being used in state offices whose cabinets were too small for them. This necessitated folding the files to fit, thereby wasting tons of space and millions of dollars. Having gone on about this for what felt like an eternity, he ended with a triumphant grin of pride over the detection and correction of so serious a problem, and held it out as a good example of how getting the private sector involved was the way to compensate for the failings of government bureaucrats.

I could hardly believe my ears: Was *this* what he thought we had come to hear? As a professional actor, he might have been expected to be sensitive to audience reaction. No such luck. Nothing daunted by the sight of the faces falling all around the table, Reagan moved cheerfully on to other such anecdotes, and was only forced into taking up the crisis that concerned us when the time came for asking him questions. Even then, he made a bad impression by dwelling gratuitously on elementary aspects of the issues that he should have realized we already knew all about.

In short, the entire performance ranged from wild irrelevance to baby talk which, if it had not been coming from a personality so obviously lacking in any such intent, we—or I at any rate—might have found insulting.

My first impulse was to agree reluctantly that what we had in Reagan was indeed an "amiable dunce," or the "airhead" that one of my friends in the labor movement had assured me he was. But on second thought I decided that this could not possibly be the case. Reagan might once have been a movie star whose main talent consisted in the ability to read lines written for him by others, but even then he had been something more than that. Not only had he been politically savvy enough to get himself elected president of the Screen Actors Guild; he had also, though still a liberal Democrat (and one who apparently leaned more to the Left than he would later let on), fought off a Communist effort to take over his union.

Partly as a result of what he had learned from that struggle, he had begun rethinking his lifelong political views. In the process, while his acting career waned and he found new employment as a traveling spokesman for the General Electric corporation, he had developed by degrees into what might have been described as a "premature" neoconservative. (He did not even become a Republican until he was past 50.) Then, in his very first run for public office, he had managed to get himself elected governor of one of the largest states in the country. There he had done what even his enemies regarded as a creditable job, and to their chagrin he then won reelection by a large margin.

At that point in my life, my own inclination (later modified by a wider acquaintance with politicians than, for better or worse, I had yet experienced) was always to assume that there had to be a core of solid and substantial stuff in any man who achieved big things in the big world, even if the qualities in question were not immediately apparent to the naked eye. Consequently I dismissed the bad impression Reagan had made on me, figuring it must be wrong, and I determined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Then, after Reagan beat out Bush for the nomination, and as his campaign against Carter heated up, I found myself heating up along with it.

I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE MY EARS: WAS *THIS* WHAT HE THOUGHT WE HAD COME TO HEAR? THOUGH AN ACTOR, HE MISREAD HIS AUDIENCE BADLY.

"Airhead" or not, Reagan was, so far as I was concerned, making all the right statements, while Carter was making all the wrong ones. Carter was sending out the subliminal message that the decline of American power in the post-Vietnam period was historically inevitable, that it was childish to resist it, and that our task was to develop the maturity to face and adjust to a development about which there was nothing we could do. But Reagan, acknowledging this decline in all spheres—military in relation to the Soviets, economic in relation to Japan, moral in relation to ourselves—was then also insisting that it had come about not through any inexorable historical forces but as the result of bad policies. We had gone astray by forgetting what it was that had made us great in the first place, and Reagan, who remembered, promised to lead us back to the true path of American greatness.

As it happens, I had just published a little book entitled *The Present Danger* which carried the subtitle, "Do We Have the Will to Reverse the Decline of American Power?" There was nothing in it about the election per se, but the themes it struck were in harmony, to say the least, with those of Reagan's campaign. Hence when Reagan won by a decisive margin, I was elated; and being human, I grew even more enthusiastic about the prospects of his presidency

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when, after being elected but before assuming office, he issued a statement urging "all Americans" to read my "critically important book."

Alas, not enough of them heeded this call to boost the sales as much as my publisher and I had expected, but in other countries Reagan's blurb was taken to mean that the blueprint for his foreign policy could be discovered in *The Present Danger*. (The French edition even carried on its cover the tag "Reagan's bedside book.") The result was that for the next few years, I kept getting calls and visits from foreign journalists demanding to know what the president was up to whenever he seemed to be deviating from some of the implications of my analysis.

The more I denied any such inside knowledge, the more world-weary skepticism I evoked, and the more I disclaimed either influence or responsibility for what the president was doing, the more it was assumed that I really was calling the shots from behind the scenes. But in truth Reagan never consulted me, and I was even more bewildered by some of his actions than were these journalists from abroad. In fact, the only time he actually spoke to me about his foreign policy was in 1982, when he telephoned to defend it against an attack on the direction it was taking that I had, out of sheer desperation, just written for the *New York Times Magazine*.

This article, to which the editors gave the accurate if unwieldy title "The Neo-Conservative Anguish Over Reagan's Foreign Policy," began by explaining why I and most of the other formerly leftist intellectuals now identified even by themselves as neoconservatives had been jubilant over Reagan's election. Then it went on to account for our disappointment, bordering on despair, over the record of his administration up to that point. I said that even though "Reaganomics" was not at that moment going well, it was still too early to tell whether his efforts to reverse the decline of American economic power by bringing "capitalism back to life in America" would succeed. Clearly, however, such efforts were being strenuously pursued, and so was his determination to refurbish and modernize "a badly deteriorated military capability." This program of rearmament, however, while absolutely necessary, was not a sufficient condition for reversing the decline of American power in the world. What was needed was action in line with the president's promise to change the direction of American policy toward the Soviet Union. Yet it was precisely on this promise that his administration was failing to make good.

I gave three examples from different parts of the world. Of these the most significant was Reagan's response to what had been going on in Poland since the Solidarity union had challenged the Communist party's monopoly of power there, and the Soviet Union had instructed its local quisling General Jaruzelski to put down this democratic uprising by military means.

Reagan had said that he expected the "evil empire" to break up some day from within, and now, suddenly, he was presented with an enormous opportunity to further and hasten that process. There was not even any risk involved in seizing this opportunity. He did not have to threaten to send troops, let alone send them. All he had to do was to stop helping the Soviets and their Polish surrogates through the various forms of economic aid they had been getting from us and other Western countries. This alone would have undermined their ability to put down the rebellion they had brought upon themselves through the depredations of the Communist system. Amazingly, however, right after martial law had been declared in Poland and while it was still in effect, Reagan threw his weight behind the bankers who insisted on rolling over the Polish loans that were just then coming due, and even helped the Poles pay the interest on those loans.

Part of my reaction to this incredibly perverse combination of action and inaction was stated in the article through quotations from two other equally shocked commentators. One was a mordant observation by the historian Walter Laqueur. According to Laqueur, not even Lenin, who allegedly predicted that one day we capitalist countries would out of the lust for profits compete to sell the Communists the rope with which to hang us, could ever have imagined that we would rush to give them the money to buy the rope. The other came from no less fervent a supporter of Reagan than George F. Will, who declared in one of his columns that the president was evidently running an administration that loved commerce more than it loathed communism.

But my own take on this disheartening turn of events was that it also involved more than the love of commerce. What it showed was that Reagan, despite his visionary rhetoric about the disintegration of the "evil empire," was in reality cooperating tacitly with the Soviet Union to stabilize that empire rather than encouraging its breakup from within. The standard rationale for such cooperation—known as the "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine"—was that the breakup of the Soviet empire carried with it the risk of military confrontations that (as happened with Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968) could only paralyze us out of the fear that they might escalate into a nuclear war. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was therefore in our own interest to join with Moscow in keeping things quiet throughout East Europe. Reagan had always explicitly rejected and even derided this rationale as the dishonorable face of détente. Nevertheless here he was, operating under the same grim imperatives.

I ended my article with the hope that he would recognize how deeply he had been unfaithful to his own principles and that he would return to them again. But in my heart of hearts, the real conclusion I reached was that this man was an even greater puzzle than I had at first imagined. Having decided that he could not possibly be the airhead or the amiable dunce that so many of his detractors saw in him, I now began wondering whether he was actually something worse.

The whole world regarded Reagan as a dangerous fanatic, and the Soviets themselves professed to believe that he had reverted to the old idea of "rollback," which Republicans like John Foster Dulles and Richard Nixon had advocated in opposition to what they denounced as Harry Truman's "cowardly" policy of containment—until, that is, they actually assumed power under Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952. From that moment on, they had pursued a course that Dulles, now secretary of state, characterized as "calculated risk" (which in practice, said the French foreign minister at the time, "most often meant that he calculated a great deal and risked nothing").

BUT IN MY HEART OF HEARTS, THE CONCLUSION I REACHED WAS THAT THIS MAN WAS AN EVEN GREATER PUZZLE THAN I HAD AT FIRST IMAGINED.

Even after observing Reagan's similarly tepid response to the Polish crisis, the Soviets kept claiming to detect in his still bellicose rhetoric a policy aimed at rolling them back "right to the gates of the Kremlin itself." The words were those of Strobe Talbott—then with *Time* magazine and now Clinton's undersecretary of state—who clearly accepted at face value what the Soviets were telling him and even seemed to agree with it himself.

Never mind that the Soviets were in all likelihood using this line not because they thought it was true but because it was useful as propaganda against the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe that had been decided upon before Reagan took office because they were needed to balance similar Soviet weapons which were being set up on their side of the line. Never mind that the evidence of Reagan's actions pointed more toward détente than toward "rollback." Never mind that while the voice of Reagan may have been that of a "reckless cowboy," the hands were the hands of Dulles and Nixon. In the face of all this, the likes of Strobe Talbott still went around echoing Soviet warnings that Reagan was about to plunge the world into a nuclear war.

It was around this time that many of his old conservative supporters began raising the cry, "Let Reagan be Reagan." Unhappy over his Polish policy, among other surprises and disappointments, but unwilling to interpret these developments as signs of weakness or even hypocrisy in their hero, they took refuge in the theory that the president was being frustrated and subverted by a staff that did not share his convictions. But this exculpatory explanation did not in fact exculpate, since it raised the question of why he had surrounded himself with such people in the first place and why he did not now fire them and bring in others who would be loyal to his stated policies. It also raised anew the old question about Reagan's intelligence: Was he so dumb that he could not even comprehend what his own administration was up to?

As for me, having already rejected the idea that he was a dunce, I went on to reject my newer suspicion that he might be the hypocrite or the wimp that some of his erstwhile enthusiasts on the Right now saw in him. But it was not the lengthy phone call he made to me about my article that did the trick. On the contrary. Flattered though I naturally was to be at the receiving end of such attentions by the president of the United States, the arguments he offered were both unresponsive to my criticisms and unconvincing in their own terms. Mainly he dwelled upon the dire economic straits in which the Soviet Union was mired—the people over there, he told me, were reduced to eating dog food—and in the end it was this factor that would do them in.

The detail about the dog food was probably one of those "facts" for which Reagan had already become notorious, but as we now know, on the central issue of their economic plight he was right. Furthermore, we also now know, and from sources which had been high up in the Soviet Union itself, that the much-derided plan he would later announce to build a missile defense hastened the demise of communism there. The Russians may not exactly have been eating dog food, but in the Kremlin it was recognized full well that the Soviet economy was simply not capable of keeping pace with the technological advances Reagan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

envisaged, and by some estimates this in itself cut at least five years off the lifespan of Communist rule.

Did Reagan, then, know what he was doing all along? I wanted very much to think so, but several of his actions made this extremely difficult. One of them was his notorious effort to trade arms for the freedom of the American hostages being held in Iran. I violently opposed this effort and attacked it in print (though no phone call came this time around). Admittedly, the merits of an opening to Iran were at least debatable within the geopolitical context of the day. Yet Reagan never started or engaged in any such debate.

Far from trying to justify himself, indeed, he kept on denying that he was doing what he was doing until he would have had to have been an even bigger and more skillful liar than Bill Clinton to continue pretending that he had remained steadfast in his firm commitment never to negotiate with terrorists and never to allow himself to be blackmailed by them. Unlike Clinton, however, Reagan seemed genuinely bewildered when it was proved to him that he had actually done something he had vowed never to do.

"A few months ago," he confessed, "I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not." The transparent sincerity of this statement may have absolved him of lying ("To this day," he would write in his memoirs, "I still believe that the Iran initiative was *not* an effort to swap arms for hostages"). But it still convicted him of obliviousness.

Another obstacle to believing that Reagan knew what he was doing was his proposal in negotiating with Mikhail Gorbachev at Reykjavik in 1986 to abolish all nuclear weapons. This, after fighting bravely against the abolitionism of the nuclear-freeze movement and resisting so much worldwide pressure against the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe. After all that, how could Reagan himself have become a convert to nuclear abolitionism? Can he have understood that, because it was impossible to abolish the knowledge of how to produce nuclear weapons, this idea was quite simply unviable? And can he have understood that it was also undesirable in the sense that, even if it were temporarily implemented, it would have made the Soviet superiority over us in conventional weapons the decisive factor in the balance of power?

Gorbachev (who for sure did not know what he was doing) saved Reagan from this folly by refusing to budge from his position that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) be included in the abolitionist package. Which brings us to the one issue on which Reagan never deviated or wavered or contradicted himself. In advancing so novel an idea, Reagan was truly original, and he was courageous in bucking the tide of ridicule that greeted it both from politicians and scientists. Most important of all, he was right in wishing to rectify a situation in which the United States remained—by a deliberate choice arrived at through the mercifully forgotten dogmas of the arms-control theologians—completely defenseless against a missile attack.

Nevertheless, as remorseless critics like Angelo Codevilla have never tired of repeating, even on SDI Reagan seemed unaware of how things were faring in the real world around him. Even though the technology was already in place for almost immediate (if imperfect) implementation, the opponents of SDI both within his administration and within the arms-control church as a whole prevailed by making certain that it remained a research project. At this very moment SDI still languishes on the drawing board, and we are still naked unto any aggressor—whether it be Iraq or Iran or China or even North Korea—that may, and sooner than we think, develop the capability to fire missiles at us armed with nuclear or chemical or biological warheads.

My purpose in being so negative is not to join in the raucous chorus of liberal contempt for Ronald Reagan. Nor is it to deny him the credit that is unquestionably his due for having slammed the brakes on the downward slide of American power in the post-Vietnam period and then pointing the ship of state in the general direction it would have to go in rebuilding that power.

Nor, finally, do I agree with those who say that it was Gorbachev and not Reagan who ended the Cold War or, more preposterously, that Reagan actually prolonged it. To repeat: Former officials of the Soviet Union have themselves given the lie to this interpretation and the charge that goes with it. In spite of all his mistakes and inconsistencies (and there were many more than the few I have mentioned); in spite of how little awareness he seemed to have about what his own people were doing in his name; and in spite of the fact that the Cold War was actually won under Bush—in spite of all this, it was Reagan (with more than a little inadvertent help from Gorbachev) who made it possible for that victory to come so much earlier than he himself, or anyone else, ever dreamed.

Nor was it only the mere prospect of SDI that brought the Soviets down. There was also the decision, delayed longer than it should have been but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finally taken, to supply the Afghans fighting against the Soviets who had invaded their country with the weapons they needed to turn that invasion into "their Vietnam." (True, some of these same Afghan "freedom fighters" are now among the terrorist leaders posing a threat to us and our allies, but that—a grisly example of the law of unintended consequences—is another story.) There was, too, the invasion of Grenada, whose paltry military significance was dwarfed by the political message it sent that the United States was no longer abiding by the nefarious Brezhnev Doctrine (according to which, once a country went Communist it must remain so forever). In Africa, the same message was sent by Reagan's support of Jonas Savimbi's forces who were struggling to liberate Angola from the Communist clutches of the government there (which had brought in Cuban troops to reinforce its own).

But the loudest message of all was Reagan's steadfast backing of the contra rebellion against the Communist Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Though there was so much opposition to this policy in Congress that implementing it led to serious legal trouble for several members of the Reagan administration, it succeeded in the end in two complementary senses. For not only did it put paid to the Brezhnev Doctrine; it also made good on the promise of the obverse Reagan Doctrine, which committed the United States to the spread of democracy wherever it might prudently be possible to do so. The mere enunciation of this commitment by Reagan would in itself have been of great political significance as part of an ideological offensive against the Soviet Union's counterclaims. But giving it military teeth, especially in Nicaragua, surely played its own part in the breakup of the Soviet Union's European empire and in the worldwide collapse of communism.

The riddle, then, remains. But let me at least take a shot at beginning to solve it while waiting for Edmund Morris to do the whole job, if he ever does. And let me inaugurate the process by telling a joke, just as Reagan himself always liked to do, except the one I have in mind is Jewish. A man gets rich, buys himself a big yacht, and then proudly goes to visit his mother wearing the uniform of a naval captain. "Why are you dressed like that?" she asks him, and he explains that as the owner of a yacht, he has now become a captain. "Well," she replies, "by you, you're a captain; and by me, you're a captain; but by a captain, you're no captain."

I think this joke throws a necessary dash of cold water on one of the ideas that has confused everyone about Ronald Reagan—the idea that he was a great ideologue or (if that term seems to carry denigratory connotations) a man of unshakable principle. Certainly this is how Reagan looked as compared with most politicians, very few of whom believe in anything very strongly, or at all. But this is not how he looked as compared with a genuinely principled person, or a truly passionate ideologue.

In other words, Ronald Reagan was much more of a conventional politician than he was taken to be. It is this that explains why he could so often compromise and sometimes violate even key elements of his putatively rock-bottom convictions; or why he tried mightily to pretend both to his friends and his opponents (and in some instances to himself as well) that he was doing no such thing; or why he was even willing to reverse course altogether for the sake of victory. The ruling passion of the politician being not only to win but to win big, Reagan went so far in his nearly successful quest to sweep all 50 states as to embrace détente in all but name during his campaign for reelection (not for nothing did I entitle an article I wrote in 1984 for *Foreign Affairs* "The Reagan Road to Détente"). Yet it was his attacks on that very policy which had as much as anything else made him a hero to his fellow conservatives.

Now, one may, as Dinesh D'Souza does in his lively polemic against Reagan's critics on both the Left and the Right (*Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*), see all this as a virtue. Alternatively, one may, like some of Reagan's disillusioned supporters on the Right, regard it as a betrayal both of them and of himself that was consummated by his own chosen successor and by the slow slippage of the Republican party back into the hands of the "moderates." Or one may, in the fashion of Lou Cannon's *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (which for sheer detail and comprehensiveness is still the closest we have to a definitive biography), conceive of Reagan as inhabiting "a fantasy world where cinematic events competed for attention with reality." But the point I am trying to make here is analytic rather than judgmental, and it is that in trying to solve the riddle of Reagan, the best way to start is to recognize the degree to which he was a normal or conventional politician rather than the conservative ideologue that so many people at both ends of the political spectrum imagined he was.

Admittedly, he differed from the usual run of Republican politicians in his understanding of communism, and this contributed to the confusion about him. Another funny story, this one true, may shed a bit of light here. Ernest Bevin, who had been a union leader all his life, and who (like Reagan) had spent a great deal of his energy fighting against Communists

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to take over his movement, became the British foreign minister when the Labor party behind Clement Attlee swept Winston Churchill out of office in 1945. Shortly after being appointed, Bevin accompanied Attlee to a summit meeting with Stalin and Truman at Potsdam, and when he returned, he was asked how, in his first foray into the realm of international affairs, he had fared against the much more experienced Soviet delegates. "Fine," said Bevin. "I know those Russians. They're just like the Communists."

Like Bevin, Reagan knew from his experience as a union president what a Communist was ("I still have the scars on my back that I got from fighting the Communists back in Hollywood," he once told a member of his cabinet). Which was more than could have been said even of the most rhetorically ferocious anti-Communists within the Republican party, and still less the more "pragmatic" ones. Most of them had never even met a Communist, and they were sometimes capable of talking about the Soviet Union as though it were a gigantic regulatory agency armed with nuclear weapons (which was the closest they could come to an image of absolute evil). As good Americans, moreover, they had a very hard time believing that anyone could ever put ideology ahead of making a good deal. This was why they—along with their allies in the business community—were such enthusiastic proponents of détente and why they maintained so devout a faith in the power of trade to trump Communist conviction.

True, as we have seen, Reagan was fully capable of setting his knowledge of communism aside when it suited his political convenience. But "by" a country-club Republican, he *was* an anti-Communist ideologue.

This still leaves the "dunce" part of the "amiable-dunce" question hanging. In the White House Reagan notoriously had trouble remembering the names even of members of his own cabinet, and he became even more notorious for his "gaffes." But as I myself approach the age at which he became president, I suffer from similar lapses. This is a common phenomenon even among people who once had extraordinary memories, and by all accounts Reagan in his younger days did: In Hollywood, for instance, he was famous for the ease and speed with which he could learn his lines. And to see an old clip of Reagan holding a press conference when he first became governor of California is to be astonished by the quickness of his mind and how articulate he was: In these respects he reminds one more of John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton than of himself as president.

And so a reasonable speculation is that, in addition to advancing age (the signs of which were already apparent in my own first meeting with him), the assassination attempt did indeed slow him down even further. What then carried him through was the "amiable" part of his nature, a quality that was reflected and magnified by his relentless optimism about his own life ("Nancy says I never get depressed," he remarks in his memoirs) and the destiny of the nation he had been chosen to lead.

WHAT CARRIED HIM THROUGH WAS THE "AMIABLE" PART OF HIS NATURE AND HIS RELENTLESS OPTIMISM ABOUT HIS OWN LIFE AND THE NATION.

Probably more than anything else, it was this cheerful outlook, especially as contrasted with the "malaise" that his immediate predecessor had both perceived and deepened, that made Reagan so popular and that then gave him the power to start turning the country around. (To be sure, this amiability is not to be confused with warmth or a sympathetic concern for others. As is demonstrated by the testimony of his own children, and by the way he insouciantly turned his back on subordinates who got into legal hot water by carrying out what they had every reason to think were his policies and desires, Reagan was a very cold fish. In fact, his almost complete indifference to everyone in his life except Nancy is precisely what may have made it so easy for him to be so cheerful all the time.)

Since his departure from the scene, the Republican party has been dreaming of another Reagan, by which some mean a great winner, others mean a great conservative, and still others mean a great crusader for democracy. But aside from being a unique personality, Ronald Reagan was the product of a set of special circumstances that no longer exist. Neither his policies, nor the way he pursued them, nor the virtually Parson Weemsish hagiographical interpretation to which they have been subjected, can serve as a model either for the present or the future. Possibly Edmund Morris will one day figure it all out and thereby deliver Reagan's still grieving followers from the fantasies that haunt their political dreams. But whether or not Morris ever succeeds in doing this job, the time has come for all the Reaganauts who keep praying for a reincarnation of their idealized hero to recognize that Ronald Reagan—whoever or whatever he really was—is gone and that we shall not look upon his like again. ♦

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Polluting Race Relations

The End of the Environmental-Justice Movement

By Roger Clegg

The movement for "environmental justice" and against "environmental racism" began in the 1980s. Its premise is that racial minorities, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, suffer disproportionately from pollution.

The data supporting this premise are underwhelming, as Christopher H. Foreman Jr. notes in *The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice*, his new analysis of the movement. Studies often define "minority community," for example, to include any area where the percentage of nonwhites exceeds the national average, so that a community may be labeled "minority" even though the vast majority of its residents are white. Not only is there little evidence of a correlation between race and the enforcement of pollution laws, but what evidence there is suggests that facilities in minority areas have actually been assessed *higher* penalties than those elsewhere. "Much of the seminal environmental-justice research," Foreman concludes, "has been called into serious question."

Christopher H. Foreman Jr.
The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice
Brookings, 191 pp., $22.95

The curious thing is that it doesn't seem to matter to believers in environmental justice. As Foreman puts it—under the apt heading "Beyond Evidence"—"formal analysis is to a considerable extent irrelevant to the underlying objectives and gratifications that stir activist and community enthusiasm." Thus, "for many activists, environmental justice is mostly about accountability and political power rather than the more technical issue of environmental risks facing communities."

The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice is a superior analysis of the intellectual failures of environmental justice as well as the social, economic, and public-health disasters the movement promises. And yet, at the same time, Foreman uses his book to make a futile attempt to rehabilitate the movement by expanding environmental justice to include anything helpful to minorities (whether related to environmentalism or not). Thus, we could have the movement claim credit for creating jobs by closing down manufacturers in minority areas—and then hiring some of the unemployed workers to do the cleanup. While Foreman recognizes the falsity of environmental justice and the damage it does to minorities,

A former deputy in the civil-rights and environment divisions of the Justice Department, Roger Clegg is general counsel of the Center for Equal Opportunity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he cannot quite bring himself to reject the movement altogether.

One venue in which environmental justice has found political currency is the Clinton administration. In 1994, President Clinton signed an executive order declaring that

> each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.

As Foreman explains, the Clinton administration embraced environmental justice, not least because "the racial minorities that constituted most of the . . . movement—African Americans, non-Cuban Latinos, and Native Americans—were crucial elements in the Democratic Party's (and President Clinton's) electoral coalition." It was good symbolic politics, even if it had no factual basis. And the Congressional Black Caucus this summer called upon the administration to "strictly enforce its rules making excess pollution in minority areas a civil-rights violation."

The primary legal tool of environmental justice is the theory of "disparate impact." No one would hesitate to condemn the actual targeting of a neighborhood for pollution *because* it was black. But what the administration wants to ban is actions that have a disproportionately bad *effect* on minority neighborhoods. The result of disparate-impact theory in employment law, where it began, has been to push employers to adopt racial quotas. And the extension of the doctrine to environmental law now encourages the enforcement of pollution statutes with an eye to race—supposedly the thing that environmental justice opposes. Where pollution is a significant threat to health, it should be addressed no matter what the color of its victims. But color-blindness is not what advocates are after these days.

Earlier this century, the Left characterized the struggle for racial equality as simply one part of its general plan for the redistribution of economic and political power. In more recent years, however, the Left has tried whenever possible to recast each element of its agenda as part of the continuing struggle against racism. The attempt to limit welfare, the war on drugs, and the fight to end racial preferences have all been declared racist. And now pollution is racist, too.

It is not hard to understand why this shift has taken place. The overwhelming majority of Americans oppose racial discrimination. Indeed, the mid-century battles against racial discrimination may be the last time the Left was correct about anything.

FOREMAN WANTS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION, WHEN IT'S PART OF THE PROBLEM.

It is of course unfair to call businessmen or local zoning officials racist when they are not. But the real victims in this scam are the racial minorities themselves. Crying racism when there is none cheapens the charge and encourages deafness when the claim might be real. Worse, the tactic encourages seeing every misfortune as the product of a racist conspiracy. This is not only false; it saps the self-reliance and personal responsibility essential for anyone to succeed—especially those starting on the lower rungs of the economic ladder.

When the environmental-justice movement began, it seemed for a short time to promise a division in the Left. "Mainstream environmentalism," writes Foreman, has been "overwhelmingly white and middle-class," more attuned to mountain trails than inner cities. But the leaders of the environmental and civil-rights groups—both against capitalism and in favor of central planning, both populist in theory and elitist in fact—quickly discovered that they could gain by joining forces.

As the child of this union, environmental justice has inherited the worst feature of each parent. The most poisonous item on the civil-rights agenda is racial quotas. And so the environmental-justice movement holds that pollution decisions must be made with reference to race. Foreman notes that at least one advocate has demanded this principle be used to ensure that EPA's expenditures are racially proportionate—despite the consequent "tendency to hamper the EPA's ability to direct funds where they are most needed in light of other, arguably more compelling, policy criteria, such as public-health impact."

One result is distraction from real health problems. The effect is "particularly insidious" given the fact that those distracted "have even fewer resources, and greater vulnerabilities, than more affluent citizens." Worse, "environmental-justice proponents generally eschew personal behavior (and necessary changes in it) as a primary variable in the health of low-income and minority communities."

A 1994 National Health Interview Survey found that 28 percent of white men smoked, versus 34 percent of black men and 54 percent of Native Americans. Among those at or above the poverty line, 24 percent smoked, while 35 percent of those below it did. Foreman observes that "it might appear mean-spirited rather than helpful to observe that the death of [environmental-justice advocate] Hazel Johnson's husband from lung cancer at age forty-one might have had more to do with his cigarette smoking than with ambient industrial pollution." But it's true.

The bad trait inherited from the environmentalists is a distaste for economic development. Foreman is not entirely satisfying on this issue. The worst thing you can do for a slum is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chase jobs from it. More and more, blacks and urban leaders are rebelling against the environmental activists who oppose economic development in their communities. "I'm trying to think of a policy that would be more effective [than EPA's environmental-redlining policy] in driving away entrepreneurs and jobs from economically disadvantaged areas—and I can't do it," the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently declared in a speech to the Black Chamber of Commerce.

The oddest chapter in Foreman's book—the place where he most obviously flees from the conclusions his own analysis suggests—is the chapter entitled "Opportunity," in which he asserts that "the enhancement of economic opportunity in low-income and minority locales has emerged as a central theme of environmental-justice policy." Foreman is exactly right in pointing out that "having little money or education has severe consequences: a greatly restricted menu of life's amenities, some of them environmental." But he then tries to make the environmental-justice movement into part of the solution, when it is part of the problem.

There may be something to be said for environmentalism, but no one can seriously argue that it has the effect of creating jobs. Nonetheless, Foreman suggests that, when environmental-justice advocates block economic development until cleanup measures are taken, they help create a net increase in jobs because someone will have to be hired to do the cleanup.

Similarly, Foreman claims that cleaning up urban "brownfields"—polluted areas where development is blocked by environmental laws—will aid economic development. But he then acknowledges that limiting brownfield development is dubious in the first place. Is he saying that the environmental-justice movement can claim credit for post-cleanup development by blocking pre-cleanup development? Or is he saying that the environmental-justice movement can claim credit for both cleanup and post-cleanup development after earlier development had been blocked by other brands of environmentalists? Either way, it's a suggestion that won't fly.

Photos: Corbis

Foreman's logic seems to be that since environmental-justice advocates want good things for their neighborhoods, and economic development is a good thing, economic development ought properly to be considered environmental justice. As a result, we find initiatives that have nothing to do with environmentalism suddenly on the agenda. This dramatic expansion of the movement can have comical effects: A House committee demanded that one program encourage "pre-employment job training; literacy; life skills; construction skills; training in the abatement of hazardous waste, lead, and asbestos; and so on." And so on? Foreman sometimes recognizes that including every issue with any connection to the environment—isn't that everything?—makes environmental justice hopelessly unfocused. But at other times he himself tries to expand its definition.

The better approach for Foreman would have been to accept the natural implication of his own critique: The movement doesn't have anything worthwhile to add to the debate about pollution. Not only does it exaggerate the extent to which pollution raises health concerns—something common among environmentalists—but it insists that our environmental and health problems are largely racial, which is simply wrong. The other key premise—that government intervention (rather than free enterprise and personal responsibility) is what poor people need—is wrong, too.

The environmental-justice movement has no support in the empirical data, its legal claims are unsound, and its desired results damage the health and economic possibilities of its intended beneficiaries. Worse, the movement encourages racial paranoia and a victim mentality, distracts attention and energy from valid public-health concerns, and discourages individuals from assuming personal responsibility and adopting a healthy lifestyle. The movement, in short, is a false and dangerous distraction. ♦

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Never-Ending Struggle

Why Progressivism Won't Die

By Michael Nyilis

In an interview with Japanese journalists in 1995, Fidel Castro had harsh words for the conservative American legislators he holds responsible for Cuba's economic misery. But he praised President Clinton for being a "progressive" and a man deeply committed to "social justice."

Even in his current troubles, the president hasn't fallen quite to the level of citing his support by Communist dictators. One can assume, however, that he would be proud to be labeled a progressive and considered a man deeply committed to social justice. After all, Clinton called E. J. Dionne's *They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era* the "best political book of 1996." Indeed, "progressive" is the new buzzword for those liberals who recognize that "liberal" is nowadays mostly a term of scorn and ridicule.

The failure of socialism around the world—most spectacularly in the Soviet Union—presents a serious problem for old-fashioned liberals: They know that socialism doesn't work (although in the back of their minds they're not entirely convinced it's ever really been tried), but the free-market alternative is too frightening to contemplate. Surely there must be a third way that progressives can rally around.

The first thing to be discovered, or rediscovered, is a different label. Even though Lenin used the term "progressive" frequently, it was good enough for Theodore Roosevelt, and it was an almost magical epithet for the intellectual followers of Herbert Croly, author of the 1909 *Promise of American Life* and the 1914 *Progressive Democracy*. After the debacles of 1984, 1988, and 1994, when liberals witnessed the successful demonization of their political heroes who dared to call themselves liberal, most of them are careful to call themselves progressive.

Balint Vazsonyi
America's Thirty Years War
Who Is Winning?
Regnery, 256 pp., $24.95

The progressive agenda of Croly's present-day heirs may look suspiciously similar to their agenda back when they all still believed that socialism was morally superior to the free market. But, in fact, this new, post-socialist progressive agenda may be even more threatening than the old one—precisely because it goes far beyond the redistribution of wealth in pursuit of social justice. Balint Vazsonyi's new study, *America's Thirty Years War*, is a devastating indictment of that agenda and the evils that will follow if it is ever allowed to triumph.

Vazsonyi is qualified to pass judgment on alternatives to the free market and democratic rule. He left his native Hungary in 1956 at the age of twenty-two, but not before experiencing national socialism under the German occupiers and the Soviet kind under the Hungarian Communists. It turns out that they were not all that different. He comes to the firm conclusion that "socialism in all its forms placed unlimited power in the hands of persons who were contemptuous of other humans and whose basest instincts were unleashed in the process."

So struck was he by the similarities between the Nazis and the Communists—and their shared hatred for the American system of government—that he decided a single philosophy lies behind all socialisms, a philosophy utterly opposed to America's founding principles. The real political conflict of modernity is between what he labels the Franco-Germanic worldview and the Anglo-American. Franco-Germanic philosophy is informed by the belief that human reason has an unlimited capacity to realize objectives in human affairs, and it has social justice as its ultimate goal. The Anglo-American view accepts limitations on what can be achieved and has no final goal in its conception of government.

The choices offered by the opposing worldviews are clear: the rule of law versus the search for social justice, individual rights versus group rights, property rights versus entitlements, and a common national identity versus multiculturalism.

Most modern progressives would argue, of course, that these oppositions are not real, that social justice and the rule of law, for example, are not incompatible. The acting assistant attorney general for civil rights, Bill Lann Lee, would surely deny that he favors group rights (just so long as we get the "right" racial outcomes). Similarly, all Democrats and nearly all Republicans are in favor of some entitlements to go along with property rights. It is perhaps only with respect to his fourth proposition, a common identity versus a multicultural America, that liberals and conservatives would agree that Vazsonyi's *America's Thirty Years War* has accurately defined their division.

But Vazsonyi makes a powerful argument that, in each of these cases, the choice between the alternatives is absolute. Property is either guaranteed or it's not, and there is no basis in the Constitution for the redistribution of wealth—indeed, the overwhelming majority of Americans would have rejected the idea outright

Michael Nyilis is a Republican speechwriter on Capitol Hill.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

until just after the turn of this century. Similarly, with deadly wit and a relentless dissection of liberalism's track record, Vazsonyi demonstrates the intellectual bad faith of those who claim to support both group rights and individual rights.

Vazsonyi defines the battle as one that began in the 1960s, and he has no doubt who is winning: "For the past thirty years, all aspects of our lives—and all of our institutions—have been moving in one direction: away from America's founding principles." This is a compelling conclusion, and one that consumes both liberals and conservatives who work on Capitol Hill.

Vazsonyi has allies, of course. For such figures as Robert Bork, for instance, it's obvious that conservatives are losing the war. And yet, at the same time, the liberals who have lived through the Reagan-Bush years and the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 are equally convinced that they are losing the war. In an insightful piece in *Dissent* in 1997, the thoughtful liberal Michael Walzer was among the first to observe this curious phenomenon, in which each side thinks the other is winning. Liberals look at electoral trends and do not take comfort. Conservatives notice that electoral trends do not seem to make any difference. Liberals seem to get their way even when the Republicans are in charge, and anyway, they have been able to get what they want through the courts and through regulation since the 1930s.

Those "extremist" Republicans of 1994 raised the minimum wage, increased federal spending by more than $50 billion every year, and created the brand-new entitlement of "Kid Care." The list of conservative grievances would consume an entire page. Two-thirds of Americans believe that the U.S. economy is on the right track, while two-thirds of Americans also believe that morally and culturally America is on the wrong track. The overwhelming sense of conservatives is that the country is on the wrong track (76 percent of Republicans, in one major poll), and most would point to the four key issues spelled out in *America's Thirty Years War* as the reason for so much of what Bork calls "gloom on the right."

Vazsonyi's analysis of the fight is full of useful observations, and the broad context in which he places them is new, although he is not the first to define these battlelines. Thomas Sowell's 1995 *Vision of the Anointed* contrasted the intellectuals still fascinated by the promise of the Enlightenment with those who accept the tragic limitations of the human condition. In a 1993 essay entitled "My Cold War," Irving Kristol declared "the fundamental assumptions of contemporary liberalism" the real enemy. And James Kurth responded in 1994 to Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* with a provocative and brilliant essay that pinpointed a clash within the West as the real clash—the multicultural project that holds Western values in contempt and has undisguised scorn for America. Sowell, Kristol, and Kurth would all agree with Vazsonyi's carefully argued thesis that America's founding principles are under attack, sometimes openly, often not.

On this last point Vazsonyi is emphatic. There has been a three-hundred-year dispute between the socialist way and what we now call the American way, and the results are in. The Franco-Germanic idea which has endeavored to penetrate the English-speaking world for three centuries did not succeed in finding a home in America until the 1960s, but now it is commonly accepted by the vast majority of those in the academic, news, and entertainment worlds. It goes by many names—liberalism, progressivism, a Third Way, the New Middle—and none dare call the idea for what it is: socialism. Given its proven record of failure, its survival depends on deception.

Who will win? Human nature is a hard thing to conquer (although that does not stop progressives and other socialists from trying), so one has to think that the American way will triumph in the end. The Republican National Committee's official magazine, *Rising Tide*, recently put Balint Vazsonyi on its cover, and *America's Thirty Years War* was recently featured on C-SPAN's *Booknotes*. Even among conservatives, hope springs eternal. ♦

Booking the Future

The Promise of E-Books and Digital Printing

By Pia Nordlinger

Books used to be simple paper blocks that you could buy only at bookstores. Sometimes the store had what you wanted. Sometimes you had to wait. Maybe for one day. Maybe for ninety.

But the Internet changed all that. The old distribution patterns were the first to go as online bookstores began delivering in a few days nearly anything in print. And now, even the idea of "in print" is up for grabs. No one—save a handful of tiny, artsy-craftsy publishers—sets books in type by hand anymore. Computers have taken over book production. Given, then, that every book published nowadays exists at some point as an electronic file, why must books pass out of print? Indeed, why must they be printed at all?

Pia Nordlinger is a reporter for The Weekly Standard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For the last decade, the dream of turning books into electronic gadgets has haunted cyber-geeks. And now, it is about to become a reality. This month, the first portable hand-held reading devices hit the market—complete with a high-speed modem for downloading finished text.

Even more likely to reform the book-publishing industry is a new method of manufacturing, known as "digital printing" or "print on demand," in which an electronic text may be printed at any time, in any quantity—down to a single copy of the book.

Both these alternatives to traditional publishing are dependent on the Internet—or rather, on the supposed fact that average readers have incorporated the Internet into their lives. Together, they promise nirvana for readers: instant access to books, even titles long out of print.

An "e-book" created by SoftBook Press was prominently displayed at the electronic-book workshop held in October by the National Institute for Standards and Technology. Text appears page by page, as in a book, rather than scrolled continuously, as on a computer monitor. The screen is backlit for reading in dim light and allows note-taking, book-marking, and searching. From a company website, users access published books or private documents stored by their business. The SoftBook costs a steep $299 with a commitment to buy $19.95 worth of text every month for the next two years. Without the content agreement, the price rises to an even steeper $599.

The "Rocket Book," backed by Bertelsmann (now, since its merger with Random House, the largest publisher in the world), is designed for the individual reader—the wealthy individual reader: The Christmas edition of Levenger's popular, high-end catalogue lists it for $499, plus $119 for a snazzy leather case. Other manufacturers are aiming at such niche markets as college textbooks. Some want e-books to incorporate pagers, e-mail, cell phones, and appointment books. But even while e-book creators are involved in cut-throat competition, they are edging toward the thing they need to make their competition meaningful: a standard for the industry. At the October conference, repeated reference was made to the VHS-Beta videotape war of the early 1980s, in which consumers loyal to the superior but defeated Beta standard were left at last with nothing to watch. As long as potential consumers fear that their e-books may not read all the books that exist in electronic form, they won't buy the devices.

The idea of a book as electronic file rather than a block of paper will take a while to catch on, and digital printing—the turning of those electronic files into printed books at the customer's whim—may prove the intermediate step. The typical book today, printed on an offset press, has a surprisingly short life. At Yale University Press, for example, a book begins with a hardcover run of two thousand. After about two years, the book goes back to press for a paperback run of another two thousand copies. When sales drop below three hundred copies a year, the book is given a last run of a thousand copies. And when those are gone, the book is declared out of print.

LOW MAKE-READY COST MAKES DIGITAL PRINTING LOOK LIKE A BARGAIN, BUT SUBSEQUENT COSTS EVEN THINGS OUT.

With digital printing, however, a book never goes out of print. Stored on an electronic database, the book can easily be printed in the three-hundred-a-year runs that Yale takes as the cutoff for its offset press. The book can be printed as orders arrive, in runs of one, five, or ten copies.

Digital printing can produce such small quantities because the processes and costs differ from those of offset printing. With its "DocuTech" machines, Xerox has emerged as the leader in the new technology. But all such digital printers begin with digitized text, and, on machines equipped for paperback binding, the transition from electronic file to finished book can take as little as five minutes.

Offset printing has high "make-ready" costs for installing text plates, loading paper, and ensuring the proper "registration" of text on the page. For a three-hundred-page paperback, the make-ready cost is around $500—with an additional one-time cost of about $1,000 for creating plates and transfer film.

In contrast, digital copiers require little pre-production. John Paeglow of Integrated Book Technologies says of his digital printers, "We can set the print engine ready to run in ten minutes." Like an office copier, the machine needs paper, toner, and someone to make sure the image is properly on the page. Xerox's print-on-demand division, Book In Time, charges fifteen cents a page for preparing a digital file, twenty-five cents for scanning in a hardcopy.

This low make-ready cost for digital printing looks like a bargain: a one-time charge between $45 and $75 for a three-hundred-page book. But subsequent costs begin to even things out. In offset printing, the printing costs 0.3 cents a page for a run of fifty thousand books, between 0.5 and 0.7 cents a page for a run of two thousand. A digital printing of the same book costs from 1 to 1.5 cents a page. The result for a three-hundred-page book, excluding paper and binding, is a post-make-ready production cost that starts at $1.50 for offset, and $3.00 for digital printing.

Large offset-print runs involve costs of storage and sales that digital printing may avoid. But digital print-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers are confronted by unexpected expenses derived from the low volume of books that is their apparent advantage. Each order exacts transaction costs: receiving the order, scheduling production, packing, and invoicing. These are the same whether the order is for two hundred copies or just one. "As run lengths go down to ten or five or even one copy, the cost of managing the transaction begins to dominate," explains Mark Fleming, an industry consultant at Strategies on Demand in Naperville, Illinois. "In the extreme, you could have a situation in which it costs $10 to produce an order and $50 to process it."

Similarly, maintenance for the new machines is expensive. Express Media, a Nashville digital printer, pays a fixed monthly maintenance fee plus a variable fee for each page printed. Offset presses create no such charges, and the larger companies can keep service personnel on staff. So too, digital machines require toner sold in expensive cartridges, while offset presses use ink inexpensive enough to be sold by the ton.

Some in the industry remain uninterested in print on demand. "I don't really think it will affect us," claims Hayward Cirker, president of Dover Publications, which prints about three hundred titles a year, the majority of them out-of-print or public-domain titles. "Publishing is advertising, selling, and promoting. If what they're doing is fulfilling the demand without advertising, without promotion or anything else that goes along with publishing, it won't interfere with genuine publishers."

But others are pressing ahead. National Academy Press has used print on demand for five years. It seems to work, however, because demand for their books already exists. "We are publishing for a market, rather than marketing a publication," explains the firm's Michael Jensen. Indeed, NAP's success derives mostly from its being among the first publishers to harness the Internet. The NAP website allows viewers to read the entire text of books before they order—and, far from being threatened, sales have risen as a result, according to Jensen.

The Internet is not merely what makes the new technologies possible; it is also what seems to be making them mandatory. "If you can log on to the Internet and see that all these titles are available, it raises your expectation about getting them," Mark Fleming claims. "That is putting pressure, for a refreshing change, on the distribution channel. Publishers, distributors, manufacturers, and retailers have to be able to deliver those titles in a relatively short amount of time."

SoftBook

Distributors are already including digitally printed books in their listings. In May, Ingram, the nation's largest book wholesaler, launched its print-on-demand division, Lightning Print, which now has about two hundred titles. Ingram senior vice-president Youngsuk Chi agrees that online bookstores have spurred print on demand: "All of this would never have happened if [the online bookstores] Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com had not made their search engines available for free."

Other businesses are actively seeking public-domain and out-of-print titles to reprint digitally. Replica Books, the print-on-demand division of Baker & Taylor, the country's second-largest book wholesaler, has the rights to about a hundred titles. "We are not in the business of printing ten thousand copies," says vice-president Frank Daly. "We are a true on-demand business. We have no inventory." Similarly, Vivisphere, an independent publishing house in Accord, New York, digitally reprints forgotten books by the likes of Erskine Caldwell and Elizabeth Spencer.

Random House, the largest American trade publisher, has treated print on demand in a different way. Judith Rossner approached Doubleday, a Random House imprint, when her novel *Emmeline* was adapted for an opera at Lincoln Center. Though the book was out of print, Doubleday published several hundred paperback copies for the gift shop at Lincoln Center and a Barnes & Noble bookstore hosting Rossner. "We see this as an opportunity to aid authors," says Random House's Stuart Applebaum. "Print on demand enables us to give a very focused redistribution on a number of titles for which there is particular demand."

Not all industry analysts are so sure the new technologies aid authors. "A publisher, theoretically, could hold on to thousands of titles that it has no interest in," points out Paul Aiken of the Authors Guild. "That situation would not be a good one for authors and would break the traditional deal between authors and publishers." Therin Raines, literary agent for Cynthia Ozick and other authors, agrees: "How will you decide when a book is out of print? This will be a difficulty for us when negotiating with publishers." The New York agent Richard Curtis has recently founded "E Rights," a company devoted to helping authors cope with electronic copyrights.

There are strong disincentives for publishers to get involved in e-books. Internet sales could weaken hardcopy sales. So too, content posted on the Internet is easy prey for pirating.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And publishers naturally dislike the costs of multiple formats—books duplicated as e-books, offset printings, and digital files.

On the new book technologies, the jury is not just out; it hasn't seen the evidence. In both electronic books and print on demand, the technology must develop and costs must fall. But the bait that hooks consumers is more likely to be speed than low price. Digital printers can produce a book in minutes. E-books can download in seconds. If these systems prove effective, what now seems like lightning—the few days it takes to receive a book purchased online—will seem like the Pony Express.

Of course, to have it, we must stop thinking of books as those familiar, inked blocks of paper. And the result could be a book industry that at last revolves around what its customers want, instead of what it guesses its customers want. We need only sign on. ♦

UNPLEASANTVILLE

How the 1950s Looked in the 1960s

By Daniel Wattenberg

Welcome to Pleasantville, the town portrayed in the satirical allegory now playing in theaters, the first feature film directed by Gary Ross, who wrote the movies *Big* and *Dave*.

It never rains in Pleasantville, the high-school basketball team never loses, there are no toilets in the stalls. It's meatloaf for dinner and cholesterol for breakfast: pancakes and waffles swimming in syrup, scrambled eggs, sausage and bacon, and—why not?—a ham steak, too. The girls wear poodle skirts and sweater sets and have two first names, the fire department rescues cats from trees, and married couples sleep in twin beds.

Familiar? It's supposed to be. It's the gray-scale world of the 1950s family sitcom, the idealized picture Ike's America had of itself, as represented in such escapist television fluff as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *Father Knows Best*.

Pleasantville is also sexually and emotionally repressed, intellectually and aesthetically barren. Parents are invincibly ignorant, their children precociously wise. It's lily white and male-dominated: Challenge the town fathers, and you'll discover the brown shirts beneath the white collars. What this crypto-fascist town needs is some sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

That too should sound familiar. It's the 1960s counterculture's idealized view of itself as the brave guerrilla fighters of America's domestic liberation movement.

In *Pleasantville*, this old heroic myth of the counterculture is recycled by teleporting two 1990s teenagers, David (played by Tobey Maguire) and sister Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon), from their frayed, single-parent home into Pleasantville, the setting for the reassuring 1950s sitcom David watches devotedly on a cable channel.

They land in the home of series parents George (William H. Macy) and Betty (Joan Allen) Parker and assume the roles of their teenage children, Bud and Mary Sue. Their 1990s individualism proves contagious to the conformist town. And as the sitcom characters begin thinking and feeling for themselves, the gray scale comes alive with color—and Lover's Lane becomes People's Park, Gene Vincent rocks the juke box, Mom learns to masturbate, and the bowling league (Robert Putnam's famous metaphor for a more civic-minded culture) becomes the incubator for a counter-revolutionary *Kulturkampf*.

The movie, number one at the box office in its opening weekend, has won critical superlatives, for both its technical ingenuity and "complex" philosophical message. The critics are right about its visual delights: The eruption of a black and white tree into orange flames and the application of black and white make-up to the sexually awakened mom's newly colorized skin are worth seeing.

But those same critics are wrong about the message. Subtle it's not. While some will maintain that the film's allegory is universal and timeless—about the lapse from innocence or the dangers of totalitarianism—I suspect the film-makers aimed at a narrower and more immediate political warning against those 1990s social conservatives who would turn the clock back to a postwar American Golden Age that never was.

The movie's Pleasantville seems intended primarily as a metaphor for life in the 1950s: American life, the old story goes, used to be as predictable in its rhythms and as aesthetically bland as the sitcoms of the time. Suburban horizons were as narrowly bounded as the limited sets of these low-budget entertainments. And above all, the people of the era were sitcom characters—devoid of free will, playing to type, as incapable of imaginatively creating lives for themselves as the stock suburbanites manufactured by the limited imaginations of Burbank hacks writing under restrictive production codes.

Pleasantville is in fact satirical. But satire is typically not complex, and it's not philosophical or interrogatory. On the contrary, it is usually doctrinaire. "Satire is thesis art," as novelist Milan Kundera put it. "Sure of its own truth, it ridicules what it determines to combat."

Daniel Wattenberg is a nationally syndicated columnist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Line Cinema

1990s teens Tobey Maguire and Reese Witherspoon, transported to the 1950s.

In accepting the idealized sitcom world as representative of American life in the period, Ross makes the same mistake as those from whom he would preserve us: the real or imagined folks nostalgic for old-fashioned values manifest in the 1950s television version of the suburbs.

America during its imagined suburban idyll was not in fact very suburban. About a third of Americans lived in suburbs then, while more than half do today.

And those televised suburban fathers who appeared, as if on cue, for a martini before dinner and then presided over the family meal? In reality, the long commutes required of the newly suburbanized professionals often meant leaving before the kids went to school and returning after they'd gone to bed.

The world of the sitcoms was fantasy—as David Halberstam reminds us in *The Fifties*, his encyclopedic answer to propaganda about the decade, pro and con: "The American dream was now located in the suburbs, and for millions of Americans, still living in urban apartments, where families were crunched up against each other and where, more often than not, two or more siblings shared the same bedroom, these shows often seemed to be beamed from a foreign country, but one that the viewers longed to be part of."

While sitcom viewers may have yearned for the fantasy, much of the intelligentsia of the time had already begun to reject it as a dangerous illusion—antiseptic, status-seeking, materialistic. And many, no doubt, regarded suburbia with the kind of ambivalence expressed by Philip Roth's Neil Klugman, driving from his Newark apartment to the suburb of Short Hills for a date with Brenda Patimkin in *Goodbye, Columbus*:

> It was, in fact, as though the hundred and eighty feet that the suburbs rose in altitude above Newark brought one closer to heaven, for the sun itself became bigger, lower, and rounder, and soon I was driving past long lawns which seemed to be twirling water on themselves, and past houses where no one sat on stoops, where lights were on but no windows open, for those inside, refusing to share the very texture of life with those of us outside, regulated with a dial the amounts of moisture that were allowed access to their skin.

There is no room in *Pleasantville* for director Ross to incorporate any ambivalence about the 1950s. The elders who rule static Pleasantville fear change above all. Does the generation that weathered the Depression, waged World War II, and watched the Iron Curtain fall across the heart of Europe really need another lecture on adapting to the new from a privileged segment of a generation whose idea of change was co-ed dorms, pass-fail grades, and junior years abroad?

In its self-assurance, *Pleasantville* belongs to an earlier, more militant phase of the culture wars. That's too bad, for a fascinating debate is underway about the proper balance to be struck between community standards and individual choice. The debate has moved beyond sloganeering and mutual caricature. Communitarians like Alan Ehrenhalt are unsentimental about the 1950s: They realistically concede that recapturing the order, security, and stability of those times means sacrificing some degree of individual choice and variety.

And on the other side of the equation, even some of the most progressive baby-boomers are coming in middle age to appreciate the restrictive values of their parents. Candice Bergen admitted that Dan Quayle was right about not having babies out of wedlock. Bill Clinton admitted that he was wrong about having sex with babies out of wedlock. And in Hollywood itself, it has been a season of reconciliation for boomers and their Depression-era parents. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* symbolically reconciled veteran fathers and their draft-deferred sons; *One True Thing*, based on Anna Quindlen's novel, aimed at the same for homemaker mothers and professional daughters.

The task of maintaining an identity as a cultural freedom-fighter must be difficult in the face of an increasingly amorphous foe. How much simpler to turn the clock back, as Gary Ross tries in *Pleasantville*—back not to the 1950s, but to the 1960s: a time when battlelines were clearly drawn, the culture war was waged in black and white, and countercultural fable served up a reliable bogeyman. He's always there when you need him, children: the smugly authoritarian paterfamilias who ruled the airwaves in the 1950s, the scripted lightweight who hasn't had an idea since the advent of color television. ♦

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Parody

"In his celebration of The New York Review of Books, James Wolcott writes of Mary McCarthy's allegedly devastating review of my book 'The Best and the Brightest.' He is too easily devastated. Her review in no way damaged the book, which reached No. 1 on the New York Times best-seller list and stayed on a 10-book list for 36 weeks, and still remains one of the primary works trying to explain how and why we went to war in Vietnam."

—David Halberstam, letter to the editor,
New York Times Book Review, *October, 25, 1998*

DAVID HALBERSTAM, ESQ.

Mary Lee Johnson
Principal
Green Acres Junior High School
Green Acres, Ohio

Dear Ms. Johnson,

News has reached me that Timmy Smith, in Mr. Ewell's 8th-grade history class, has asked to be excused from a book report on my masterwork, "The Best and the Brightest," on the grounds that it is "too long." Let me remind you that this book perched atop your local newspaper's best-seller list for nearly a year in 1972 and that in 1975 a young man in Worcester, Massachusetts, stopped me on the street and declared that he "was sorry to see it end." Perhaps Timmy Smith has somehow been influenced by Mary McCarthy's notorious review in The New York Review of Books. Let me merely declare categorically that her review in no way devastated my book, as evidenced by the fact that I am still appearing at extremely well-received authors lunches while Ms. McCarthy is as dead as a door nail.

Frequently I remark on the injustice of Ms. McCarthy's envy-ridden essay. Often when I do, someone nearby will interject, "Give it a rest, Grandpa. That was 35 years ago. It's time to move on." But I can in no way turn my back on one of the malevolent episodes of recent American literary history and am even now completing my 4,200-page life's work, "The Author Responds," which will finally rebut Ms. McCarthy's charges point by point.

In the meantime I must add that Ms. McCarthy never actually went to Vietnam and in fact wrote her "dispatches" from the war after seeing "The Green Berets" starring John Wayne. Every word she ever uttered was a lie including "a" and "the." I, on the other hand, was accepted as a peer by the fighting men in "Nam" (one of whom once jocularly said to me, "Get off my stool, Peckerhead"). And I was prized as an honest reporter by the nation's most powerful leaders, notwithstanding the fact that Dean Rusk called me Arnaud de Borchgrave until the end of his days. All of this explains why the Doubleday bookstore in Topeka felt that my book merited placement on a shelf right at eye level in the middle of the general non-fiction section, rather than lower down, where some less well-received books were stored.

In sum, let us not forget that "The Best and the Brightest" stands alone at the pinnacle of American literature. Timmy Smith's education will not be complete if he does not finish it.

Sincerely,

David Halberstam
New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED